

A Sin That Spoils Everything

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[0 : 0 0] at Joshua chapter 7, which is on page 221. But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things. Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zimri, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel. Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-Avon to the east of Bethel, and told them, go up and spy out the region. So the men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, not all the army will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it, and do not weary the whole army, for only a few people live there. So about three thousand went up, but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about 36 of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries, and struck them down on the slopes. At this, the hearts of the people melted in fear and became like water. Then Joshua tore his gloves and fell face down to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there until evening. The elders of Israel did the same and sprinkled dust on their heads, and Joshua said, alas, sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan, pardon your servant, Lord, what can I say now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this, and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name? The Lord said to Joshua, stand up. What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned.

They have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen. They have lied. They have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them. In the morning, present yourself tribe by tribe. The tribe that the Lord chooses shall come forward clan by clan. The clan that the Lord chooses shall come forward family by family, and the family that the Lord chooses shall come forward man by man. Whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done an outrageous thing in Israel.

Early the next morning, Joshua made Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He made the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. Joshua made his family come forward man by man, and Achan, son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen. Then Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have. Do not hide it from me.

Achan replied, It is true, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done. When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent with the silver underneath. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out before the Lord. Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan, son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent, and all that he had to the valley of Acre. Joshua said, Why have you brought this trouble on us?

The Lord will bring trouble on you today. Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up large piles of rock, which remains to this day.

[4 : 32] Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Acre ever since. Good evening St. Silas. I'm Martin Ayers, if we've not met the lead pastor here. Thanks Nicola for reading that for us. It's a difficult passage for lots of us. Do keep it open in front of you at Joshua chapter 7 on page 221. You can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful, and let's pray. Let's ask for God's help. Some words from Romans 15. For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope. So Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, the scriptures, and we pray that you would teach us endurance this evening, and you would give us encouragement, and we pray that through that endurance and encouragement we might have hope.

For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Well, I wonder how you feel when God says to you that something isn't for you. When we feel challenged by that from his word, how do we feel when God is calling us to give something up for him? We're in this series in Joshua working through these incredible events and how God dealt with his people. So we're after Noah, we're after Abraham, we're after Moses, and Joshua was leading the people of God into the promised land that had been promised to Abraham. And we get to chapter 7 of Joshua, and there are some big surprises in this chapter. It's surprising because for the first time in the book, things go really badly. So far, what we've seen is God is faithful and keeping every one of his promises. God is powerful, and last week the wars of Jericho, this fortified city that stood in the way of the conquest, came crashing down. And the people so far are responding faithfully to their faithful God. So we don't expect things to go suddenly badly with this battle to take what was a much smaller city of Ai. But it's also surprising for us because we see God treating sin really severely.

And the first thing to appreciate to help us understand that is what Achan did was a really big deal. So that's our first point on the sheets there, the serious nature of Achan's sin.

Lord Joshua doesn't know about the sin yet. We get told about it in verse 1, if you have a look again with this abrupt but, verse 1. But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things.

Achan, son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them, so the Lord's anger burned against Israel. When God gave the promised land to his people, the things of value in the cities were devoted to the Lord. So they could either be used in worship, taken to the Lord for the assembly, or they were burnt. For that reason, the people weren't allowed just to take what they found as plunder. Now why is that rule so important? It's because it's critical to the legitimacy of the conquest that for this unique moment in global history, the people of God were his instruments of judgment on the sin of the people of Canaan in the promised land. The people who lived in that region, the Canaanites, had practices that were detestable to God.

[8 : 29] Perhaps the most horrific of which was that they were sacrificing children to the idols they worshipped. And if you imagine what that would have been like, thinking about how horrified we would be if that was going on in a region near us in Scotland today, and remembering that however offended we might be by that, God is so much more deeply offended by that.

So when he sends the people into the land, the property they recover as their conquest brings God's judgment on those people, that property, it's being kind of reclaimed for the Lord, because the Lord is the rightful owner of all things. If an Israelite takes those devoted things without permission, then he is stealing from God.

And that makes him no different from the nation that's under judgment. The Lord gives Joshua a better understanding of the wrongness of Achan's sin. Further down in verse 11, if you just have a look there, the Lord says, Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant.

The covenant is the relationship between God and his people based on binding promises from God to the people. God is giving his people the land. He's keeping his covenant of love with the people he's rescued.

And they have to keep their side of the covenant. But verse 11, they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen. They have lied.

[10 : 07] They have put them with their own possessions. So this is offensive to God. It's not that he needs those things. It's that devoting the things to God is an expression of faith. And Achan taking them makes a statement about what he thinks of the God who's rescued them.

Devoting the plunder to God is an invitation for the people to say, God is enough. It's just like in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve are in the garden and they're told, you're free to eat from any tree.

There's just one tree. There's just one tree that you're not to eat from. There's one rule you have to follow that shows that you trust God. You trust that God is good and that God is in charge.

One rule. And here, the rule is a way of saying, I trust that if God has said, this isn't for me, then I don't need it. And instead, Achan takes the devoted things.

So he's, if you like, he's making the people of God look more like pirates. You know, going in, getting the plunder, as though the conquest is about materialistic greed, about getting from the people what's theirs.

[11 : 25] when the conquest is meant to be, God giving his people a land that will be a glimpse of God's perfect new creation, the highlight of which will be that God will dwell among his people in a fixed abode in the temple when it gets built.

Let's notice as well, everyone knew the rule. So Achan doesn't say, oh goodness, I'm so sorry. I've misunderstood. I've understood what the stuff was, we're not meant to take it.

I didn't realize. No, he's hidden it away. It's thoughtful sin. High-handed sin, it's sometimes called in the Bible. When you sin with a high hand against God, it's that the hand is clenched, sinning with a clenched fist.

And it's unrepentant sin. And that's why we get, I think, this very drawn-out process from verses 13 to 19 of the chapter, of identifying Achan. That Joshua hears that there's the sin in the camp, and he relays to the whole nation.

They have to consecrate themselves. And then a night passes, and then the next day, the people all have to assemble, an extraordinary number of people. And then they step forward, clan by clan, and Judah is chosen.

[12 : 38] And then the tribe is chosen. And then the family is chosen. And then they come out man by man. And then Joshua has to confront Achan. Why? Even after the military defeat, and Joshua's despair, Achan still doesn't come forward, to say what he's done.

He seems to think that he can deceive God, and deceive God's people. Which is just a reminder to us, that whatever we've done against God, or whatever we're doing against God in our lives, whatever we might be withholding, if we're conscious of that, it is always so much better, to bring it into the light.

To bring it out into the open. Achan is unrepentant. So that's the serious nature of Achan's sin. And our second point tonight, is the dreadful results of Achan's sin.

First it means defeat. Defeat for the whole people. In verse four. About three thousand went up, from Jericho to Ai. That's about 15 miles from Jericho.

So they're going to the next city, in conquest. But they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about 36 of them. The sin of one man, and his family, affects the mission, of the whole people of God.

[13 : 58] And when God was with his people, earlier in Joshua, giving them victory, we heard that the hearts of the Canaanites, the enemies, were melting in fear.

But now, by the end of verse five, we read, at this, the hearts of the people, that's God's people, melted in fear, and became like water. As God turns his face away, from his people, they're left, in fear of their enemies.

And it's still the case today, that one person's sin, can hold back the mission, and prosperity, of the whole people of God. Your sin, it might look private, you might think of it, as just about you, but it affects everyone.

The writer David Jackman, says this, for the church, all through history, the greatest obstacle, of its progress, is the sin of its people. Not the threats, or opposition of people outside.

So there's defeat. The next dreadful result, is despair, in verses six to nine, as Joshua, tore his clothes, and he fell face down, to the ground, before the ark of the Lord. That's, kind of symbolic, of the presence of God, among his people.

[15 : 06] So, Joshua is, before the face of God, tearing his robes, in despair. And the elders of Israel, do the same. And Joshua, prays in despair.

Another dreadful consequence, of Achan's sin, is death. The 36 Israelites, who die in the battle. And at the end of the chapter, we see Achan, and his family, put to death. And it demonstrates for us, that the wages of sin, is death.

It's why death, is in the world. Because we all sin, so we all die. In that sense, all we see, in Achan's sin and death, is a speeding up, of that process.

A bringing forward, of his death. But we all live, under the sentence of death, for our sin. But the way, the chapter is structured, the writer wants us, to focus in, as a climax, on one more consequence, of Achan's sin, and its departure.

The key verse, is the second half, of chapter, of verse 12. That sentence there. So, if you just look down, second half of verse 12. God says, I will not be with you, anymore.

[16 : 15] Unless you destroy, whatever among you, is devoted, to destruction. In other words, if you don't put right, this sin, and destroy the devoted things, you will lose, the presence of God.

And that's a key moment, in the conquest. When the Israelites, were rescued from Egypt, and they were brought, to Mount Sinai, Moses went up the mountain, to get the law of God, for the people. And when he comes back down, they've, they've made a golden calf, and they're worshipping that instead.

And God said, in Exodus 33, to Moses, leave this place, you and the people. I'll give you the promised land. I'll send an angel with you.

But I won't go with you. And all the people moaned. And Moses said to God, if your presence, doesn't go with us, don't send us, from here. In other words, having the promised land, is nothing, if you haven't got God.

And that's the exact opposite, of everything, that our culture will tell us. Our culture says, all around us, in Glasgow, Scotland, the UK, the West, we want the Garden of Eden, but we don't want God.

[17 : 23] We want to make heaven on earth, we want paradise, but we don't want God with us. He'll spoil it. And the Bible teaches us, if you don't have God with you, in your life, you could be in the Garden of Eden, and it will be terrible.

As David says to God, in Psalm 16, he says, you are my God, apart from you, I have no good thing. And it's good to ask ourselves, do we believe that?

Because it's not what, the people kind of, a step above you at work will say, or the people doing the graduate job, that you want will say. They will think, if I can just get this success, I'll have paradise, I'll be fulfilled.

But God says, if you don't have him, you could have all the success, the popularity, the comfort of the world, and you're heading for despair, because you're spiritually dead, you don't know God, and you're heading for eternal death, without God.

So that's our second point, the dreadful results, of Achan's sin. It's a disaster. He's going to end up, at the end of the chapter, buried under stones, which is just what we saw last week, happens to the enemies of God.

[18 : 29] The people of Jericho, were buried under stones. Anyone from Jericho, could have turned back to God, like Rahab did in Jericho. If you turn back to God, you get to be with him.

But anyone from the people of God, who turns from the Lord, ends up under judgment, like the people of Jericho. And it leaves you thinking, how in the cold light of day, could Achan have done this mad thing?

So that's our third point, the seductive power of Achan's sin. Basically, verse 20, is like watching a train crash, in slow motion. Verse 20, Achan replied, it is true.

I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done. When I saw in the plunder, a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them, and took them.

They are hidden in the ground, inside my tent, with the silver underneath. Now how did Achan get into this mess? He craved, He coveted, what was forbidden.

[19 : 35] And that's what sin does in our hearts. That's why it slows down here, to show us step by step, what happened. The human heart can crave something so much, that it makes us suicidal for it.

It's one of the reasons it's so wise, to avoid temptation in your own life. Because in a moment of temptation, that allows us to dwell, on what we're tempted by, we can end up wanting something so much, we will take it, even if the consequences, would be catastrophic for our lives.

I heard recently about a minister, a guy I don't actually know, but he's been caught up in sexual immorality, that's been kind of uncovered. And he's basically destroyed his life. He's destroyed everything he worked for, he's destroyed his family.

It's all gone. Friendships have gone, betrayal. And one of my mates, who knows him, was talking to me, about what had happened. And he said to me, reflecting on it, I just need to remember, if I was ever tempted, to have an affair, I have to say to myself, you are about to ruin, your whole life.

Why didn't this guy, see that coming? Well that's how sin, gets to work in our lives. That in the moment, we don't think like that. Sin in our hearts.

[20 : 54] It's like in The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, C.S. Lewis has this novel, he's playing with lots of ideas, from the Christian faith, and he has Edmund, take some Turkish delight, in Narnia, from the Snow Queen.

And he says this about it, he says, the Turkish delight, is enchanted, so that it's so alluring, anyone who tasted it, would, if allowed, go on eating it, until they killed themselves.

It's just a picture, of what sin is like, in our hearts. So notice the steps, before Achan gets there. First of all, he sees, the plunder, he sees it. You can't help, but notice things.

We'll always notice things, that are, in a sense, desirable, and not right, for us to take. But what he does here, when it says he sees, is actually more than that, it's that he beholds them.

It's like he gazes, at what he sees. So he didn't stop, when he saw it. And you see that, in how he describes it. He says, when I saw, a beautiful robe.

[21 : 57] It's as though, even as he speaks about it, in front of Joshua, he just wants us to know, how beautiful that robe, was that he saw. It's just like Eve was, in the Garden of Eden, when she saw, the fruit of the tree, that was forbidden.

She sees it, but then she beholds, its goodness. And then she takes it. And Achan's the same, he beholds, what he sees. And Achan's sin here, is like a paradigm, because, did you notice, where the robe is from?

The robe, is from, Babylon. It's a Babylonian robe. It's actually from, Shinar, where the, which I think is in our footnotes there.

Where, yeah, you see the footnotes of verse 21, in our church Bibles? Shinar was where the Tower of Babel, was built. Human energy, and brilliance, devoted to defying God.

In other words, here is an Israelite, being brought into, the promised land, which is a picture of, restored, renewed creation. A new thing from God, a new start. And this robe, that ensnares him, is the epitome, of human creativity, apart from God, away from him.

[23 : 11] For the glory of man, not the glory of God. And he can't bear, to let go of it, as he is invited, to take hold of God's gifts. So he sees, he gazes.

The third step, in sin getting to work, is he meditates on it. He lets his imagination, get to work, on what he finds. So look at what he says, again, about the silver and gold.

He says, there were 200 shekels, of silver. How did he know, there were 200 shekels?

He's counted them out, hasn't he? How did he know, how much the gold weighs? He says, the gold weighing 50 shekels, verse 21. How did he know?

He's gone and got his scales, hasn't he? To weigh it. And in weighing and counting, what he's doing is, he's spending time, with what's forbidden, feeling the weight of it.

[24 : 12] And weightiness is a big thing, in the Bible, because the word for weighty, is the same word for glory. Glory is about worth. And instead of glorifying God, Achan is glorifying the silver and gold, that he knows he's not allowed.

So instead of setting his imagination, on God's worth, and God's gift to his people, God's provision, of this wonderful new creation, he's setting his imagination, on the glory, of what God says no to.

He's dreaming, of its weightiness. Weightiness. So then he covets, the gold, the silver, the robe. In other words, he craves them, just as in our life, if you gaze, on the best the world can offer, without God, and you set your imagination, on it, eventually, you'll be so consumed, by your sense of its glory, that it will take over your heart, and it will drive your life.

And we have to learn that, about our sin. The Bible talks about, mortifying your sin. In other words, putting it to death, but it's like, putting it to death, at its root, rooting it out, of your life.

Otherwise, by the time you're craving something, it's probably too late. I'm not saying give up, at the point of craving, but just to recognize, that when you see things, in the world, without guarding, your heart and mind, that seeing, becomes gazing, and the gazing, becomes dreaming, and the dreaming, leads you to craving, and then in the craving, you take.

[25 : 45] And what will heal us? Well, we've got to turn, our gaze. The only way, to stop gazing on, and meditating on, the glory and beauty, of worldly things, is to gaze on, and meditate on, the glory of God.

The preacher, and writer, Thomas Chalmers, a Christian, in the 19th century, in Edinburgh, he called this, the expulsive power, of a new affection. In other words, when our mind, and imagination, is filled with the beauty, and majesty, and glory of God, it expels, out of our hearts, desire for other things.

If we just, arm ourselves, in the battle against sin, with thinking, I must stop sinning, I must stop thinking, about sin, all we'll be doing, is thinking about sin. Just as Achan, was thinking about that silver, and counting it out, and the gold, and weighing it up, and the robe, and it was such a beautiful robe.

Instead, we have to take the same steps, towards God, as sin wants to work in our hearts, towards other things. We have to see, the glory of God, and we have to behold it, prayerfully, asking God, to give us a deeper sense, of his glory, his beauty.

We have to spend time with him, it takes disciplines, getting steeped in his word, making time, with other Christians, to talk about, the majesty of God, to talk about, the wonder of Jesus.

[27 : 14] Be aware, of what you're making time, to gaze at. Think to yourself, when you're on your own, and your imagination wanders, where does it wander? Is it, to right move?

Or, to, what is it to? Could we, exercise discipline, so that our minds, our imaginations, are contemplating, who God is, and what he's done, and what he's providing for us, in the gospel?

Would Achan, have buried this plunder, if he really meditated, on who God has shown himself, to be for his people, and what he's providing, for his people, in the promised land?

He's glorious. Would he still have craved, the silver, if he'd had a deeper sense, of the treasure, of the glory, of knowing God? Our hearts, they're not going to fall, for the allure of sin, if we are captured, by the glory of God, and the grace of God, to us, in redeeming us, adopting us, forgiving us.

And we get a little glimpse, of that tonight, even at the end, of that, this tragic chapter. So that's just our fourth point, the hope, in the valley of Achan's sin.

[28 : 26] The chapter ends, in verse 25, with God's anger, turned aside, from his people, by the death of Achan, and his family. Then all Israel, stoned him, and after they'd stoned the rest, they burned them.

Over Achan, they heaped up, a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Why does the family, get stoned? It could be, because Achan is the head, of a family unit, and so he represents them.

I think it's much more, more likely, the family were involved, in the sin. In Deuteronomy, God's people are commanded, not to punish sons, for the sin of their fathers. So I think it's, that the whole family, were complicit, in what was going on, in digging the hole, and burying the treasure, and hiding it away.

But once Achan is judged, we hear that the Lord, turned from his fierce anger. Therefore, that place has been called, the valley of Achan, ever since. It means, the valley of trouble.

And the trouble, is human sin, met with the holiness of God. But that is not, the last we hear, about the valley of Echor. And I've just put on your sheets there, at the bottom there, a quote from the prophet Hosea, centuries later, in Hosea chapter 2, when again, the people of God, together, had turned their hearts, away from God, to worship other gods.

[29 : 41] And God promises, instead of judgment, a day, when it will all change. Not through him, punishing their sin, but through him, winning their hearts, back to him.

He says, Hosea 2, 14, therefore, I am now going to allure her. I will speak, I will lead her, into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.

God is going to turn his people back, by winning over their hearts. Verse 15, then I will give her back her vineyard, so the blessing will come. And I will make the valley of Echor, a door of hope.

You see that valley of trouble, that we're in tonight, becomes a door of hope. And it's hope, because the people, are responding rightly to God. There she will respond, as in the days of her youth, as in the days she came up, out of Egypt.

And God is speaking there, about the days of the new covenant, of Jesus coming, after Hosea's time. This chapter shows us, what Achan's sin did to him, but it also impresses on us, what our sin did to Jesus, at Calvary.

[30 : 47] God is just as holy today, as he was then. His holy wrath, burns against sin, just as strongly today, as it did then. But then, it was the death of Achan, the sinner, that turned God's holy wrath, aside from his people.

And at Calvary, it was the death of Jesus, the sinless one, that turned God's holy wrath, aside from us. Or to know more deeply, what Jesus bore, in his wisdom and grace and power, to win us as his bride, to make us his inheritance, because he moves our hearts, to repentance, as he gives us every spiritual blessing, when we turn to him.

Where do you go to gaze on the beauty of God, the glory of God? To the face of Jesus, the one who loved you, and gave himself for you. Let's pray together. Father God, we acknowledge tonight, that we need your spirit's work in us, to grasp more deeply, the offense of our sin, to you, a righteous holy God.

Would you enlarge our hearts, with a deeper sense of your holiness, your perfection, and would our sense of, how grotesque sin is, be accompanied by a growing wonder, at your grace, that our gaze would be fixed, on your glory in Jesus Christ, and your spirit would use, that grace and glory, to transform us more and more, into his likeness, for his name's sake.

Amen. Amen.