

Message #14

Joshua 7:16-26

Mel Trotter once told the story about a man on the board of the Mel Trotter Mission in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who was a doctor who would often pray this way: “Lord if I have sinned, forgive my sins.” Mel Trotter got tired of listening to this over and over again and he finally confronted the man and said to him, “Listen Doc, you say, if I have sinned. Don’t you know what your sin is?” The doctor replied, “No, I don’t know what it is.” Mel Trotter said, “If you don’t know, then guess at it.” The next board meeting the doctor prayed and Mel said, “He guessed it the first time.”

Many Christians can spot sin in nightclubs, bars, liquor stores and other places, but they cannot seem to spot it in themselves. We have a way of dancing around a sin problem especially if a sin problem is within ourselves. But when we do that, what we don’t realize is that we are affecting our self, our family and the entire church.

There is a dangerous attitude that can creep into the life of a believer that says, “I am my own person.” Now in some respects that is true, but in other respects that is not true. The truth is once we are in the family of God we are not our own person. We are part of the body of Jesus Christ and the family of God. Dr. Martin Woudstra, the former professor of Old Testament studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, who is now with the Lord, who wrote a good commentary on Joshua, said many years ago, “Properly understood the Bible does not teach individualism anywhere” (*Joshua*, pp. 130-131). Just as Paul taught in the N.T. we are part of the body and when one member hurts, we all hurt.

Unconfessed sin and unfaced sin does not just have an effect on the individual, it can have an effect on the whole group. Dr. C. I. Scofield said, “The whole cause of Christ is injured by the sin, neglect, or unspirituality of even one believer” (*Joshua, 7:11 note*, NASV, p. 316). The closer we are to God, the more we realize we are connected to each other. If ever there is a text that communicates this point, it is this one right here.

Joshua 7 is a story about one person who sinned against God and one person who tried to cover his sin and ended up angering God and costing the entire nation of Israel a terrible defeat. **What we don’t know from this story is what would have happened if Achan had voluntarily come clean of his sin.** What we don’t know is what would have happened if God would not have had to search out the sin. If Achan would have come clean of his sin and not tried to cover it, we do not know what God would have done. God does say in His Word “If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged” (I Cor. 11:31).

But Achan was not about to admit his sin so God had to go through a process to get him to admit it and once it reaches this level, when God has to step in in some judgment matter, it is too late for grace. The lesson to learn here is this:

WHEN GOD IS ANGERED BY SOMEONE TRYING TO COVER HIS OR HER SIN AND DECIDES THAT HE MUST EXPOSE IT AND JUDGE IT, THE REST OF THE GROUP WILL SEE GOD DESTROY THE ONE WHO ANGERED HIM.

It has been my observation that when God surfaces someone's sin in the church, it has been going on for a long time. I have never been involved in any church discipline matter where a sin surfaced if the person were working on things in his or her own life. By the time sin surfaces in the church, it has usually gone on and on and never was faced.

Now one may think this text about God destroying someone for unconfessed sin is just Old Testament teaching. Well, Jesus Christ warned a N.T. church in Thyatira that if people did not deal with their immoral sin, He would start literally killing people (Revelation 2:21-23). So this is not just Old Testament theology.

There are three historical observations we want to make from this passage:

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #1 – The one who committed the sin is identified. 7:16-18

Numbers 32:23 says–“and be sure your sin will find you out.” God will forgive “any sin,” but the sin must be faced and if it is not faced, it will be discovered and uncovered.

Achan did not just come forward and admit he had sinned. God used a Divine process to expose it. We may recall that God said He would expose the sin by “lot” (v. 14). According to **verse 16**, Joshua got up early in the morning to get at it. He knew this needed to be resolved because the success of the entire nation was on the line and Joshua was not about to waste any time.

What we see about Joshua is that when there was a job to do for God, he did not procrastinate. If the job were positive or negative, he got up early and got busy. He was willing to do God's will when it was wonderful and positive and when it was hurtful and negative.

Now “casting lots” was not like playing the lottery. In the Bible, the casting of lots was a Divine method of identification and communication, prior to the written Scriptures being completed. This specifically was a method of revelation for national Israel (Num. 26:55; I Sam. 14:41-42; Acts 1:26).

Apparently from **verse 16** we learn that each tribe was brought before Joshua and lots were cast. Once Joshua determined the tribe from which the culprit came, then he could determine the family in the tribe and then he could determine the actual man who committed the sin.

All of this would have taken time as the story progressed and this whole process would have been the talk of the nation. Achan's sin was going to be fully and publicly exposed. God is publicly tracking this man down.

According to **verse 16-17**, the tribe on which the lot fell was the tribe of Judah. So someone from the tribe of Judah was responsible for the sin that angered God and gave Israel a loss.

We learn from Numbers 26:19-20 that the Zerahites were of the tribe of Judah. **Verse 17** informs us that the lot fell to the tribe of Judah, then to the family of the Zerahites. The family of the Zerahites was brought before Joshua and then man by man lots were cast until the family of Zabdi was uncovered. According to **verse 18** once that happened, all in this family was brought before Joshua and then man by man lots were cast until Achan was revealed.

Now think of this; **Achan made his entire family become totally humiliated until God finally revealed that it was him. He knew all along that he was the culprit, but he let everyone go through this process, probably hoping he could hide.**

Judah is one of the great tribes of God, but it does not matter how great your tribe or your family; you can have people in the greatest and most spiritual of families who are covering up serious sin. Just because a person has a great family link or a great church link does not mean everyone in the family loves God, loves the Word and loves righteousness.

There are three practical points to see:

- 1) One can be hiding in sin and be in a great church family.
- 2) One can humiliate their family because of their sin.
- 3) When someone in the family falls into sin, it should be viewed as a very serious matter.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #2 – The sin of Achan is exposed. 7:19-21

According to **verse 19**, Joshua talked to Achan as a son. Joshua will find no pleasure in any of this. This began as a tender-hearted conversation between Joshua and Achan, but this will not stop the consequences. When Jesus Christ confronts His own at His Judgment Seat, it will be, I am sure, a tender-hearted conversation; but it will not stop the consequences of the rewards, which will be a loss of rewards. There will be a one-on-one conversation and Jesus Christ will speak to us as His child, but it will not prevent Him from an accurate judgment.

Now notice carefully what Joshua says in **verse 19**: “give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel” by telling the truth about your sin. Do not miss this point. **When a believer tells the truth about his sin, it gives glory to God because it displays the fact that the person wants to do what is right before God.**

The truth is God has seen every sin anyway. So when a person admits it to God, it glorifies God because it says, “I need to take care of this so there is no breach in our relationship.” **God is never glorified when we cover up our sin; but He is glorified when we confess our sin.**

When you sin, go right to God and confess it because that is what glorifies Him. The sin does not glorify God, but what we do about the sin glorifies God.

I am convinced that this is one reason why God permits sin. When we confess it to Him recognizing how repulsive it is to God, it truly does glorify Him. When we refuse to confess sin, we not only rob ourselves of pardon and peace, but we rob God of His glory. Now there are two parts to this confession:

Confession Part #1 - Achan admits who he sinned against. **7:20**

Achan admits that he has sinned against God. Now remember, he would never have admitted this on his own. He is not admitting this because he was under overwhelming conviction. He is admitting this because he got caught. Achan's admission of sin is a lot like Saul's (I Sam. 15:24) and like Judas (Matt. 27:4). We must always remember that any sin we commit is a sin against God.

Confession Part #2 - Achan admits the details of his sin. **7:21**

Here is a case study in the process of sin and also a case study in how to actually deal with the sin. **One thing we see here is that true confession does not deal in generalities.**

There are three confession admissions that Achan admits:

(Admission #1) - Achan saw it. **7:21a**

This is the very same word that was used in regard to Eve's sin in Genesis 3:6. She saw the fruit and it looked good.

Achan saw the "mantle from Shinar." The mantle was apparently a beautiful Babylonian robe. Shinar is a synonymous term for Babylon (Gen. 10:10; Is. 11:11; Dan. 1:2; Zech. 5:11). It is possible that this was a royal robe that was beautiful and expensive. He saw two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold worth 50 shekels.

The word "shekel" means weight. The exact worth of this is almost impossible to ascertain. Leon Wood says the shekel weighed about four-tenths of an ounce (*A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 175). On the other hand Dr. Woudstra says it was about three-tenths of an ounce (*Joshua*, p. 129). Irving Jensen said based on this type of computation that the silver was worth about \$200 and the gold was worth about \$500 (*Joshua*, p. 69).

So Achan saw this beautiful robe and all of this money. It all started when he looked at it. Look at something long enough and it can affect you. Many people who buy something do so because it started with a look. They looked at it and felt like they had to have it.

(Admission #2) - Achan coveted it. 7:21b

This is the same word that is used in the famous Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). Coveting is forbidden by God in His Word. Achan saw these things and he wanted them. This is the sin Paul said he struggled with himself (Romans 7:7-8). Had Achan dealt with the sin here and confessed it, things could have turned out differently; but he didn't.

(Admission #3) - Achan took it. 7:21c

Achan saw it, he coveted it and he took it. It did not matter that God's Word said, "No"; he did it anyway. This is the way sin will get you. Here is the process. You see it, you want it and you take it and you do it.

But carefully notice the end of **verse 21**, he "concealed" it. He did not come clean of anything. He covered it up. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

Sin starts with a look. You look at and then you want it and then you go after it. That's the process. If Achan would have dealt with things at the seeing level or at the coveting level, he could have prevented the taking level. But unfortunately, he did not do that.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #3 – The sin of Achan is completely eliminated. 7:22-26

Joshua immediately sent messengers to get the sinful stuff so they could get rid of it. They were hidden in the tent. Probably buried.

According to **verse 23**, they brought everything out in front of all of Israel and they poured it out before God. Achan's sin was not private anymore; it was fully exposed. This is the way to deal with sinful things, get rid of them.

According to **verse 24**, Joshua and all of Israel took Achan, the stuff he stole, his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and they brought all of it to the "valley of Achor." The word "achor" in Hebrew means disaster or trouble.

According to **verse 25**, when they were all there, Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us?" and "all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they were stoned to death."

Achan's sin had jeopardized the whole nation of Israel as it was about to take the Promised Land. The nation's destiny was at stake here and this horrible act of disobedience needed to be eliminated. The only way to deal with sin is blot it out. The way to get the sin removed is by confession and when a person refuses to face it before God, it hurts him and it hurts others.

After that, according to **verse 26**, they raised a great heap of stones over him and the LORD turned His anger away from Israel. This heap of rocks would be a memorial to the disaster that unconfessed sin may bring.

One may think his sin is just between him and God. Well there is a part to that which is true. But our sin also can affect everyone connected to us—our mate, our children, and our church.

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS:

- 1) Achan was a believer when he committed this sin.**
- 2) Achan's one sin affected everyone else. There is corporate culpability. Even when sin is hidden from others, it still affects them.**
- 3) Confessing sin glorifies God.**
- 4) Covering sin is a sure way to judgment.**
- 5) The best way to deal with sinful things is through elimination.**
- 6) When we sin, we need to judge ourselves unmercifully and we will experience the mercy of God.**