

Achan – Joshua 7

I. INTRODUCTION – Reading – Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A. *Birds in His Shorts*

1. He thought he was so clever.
2. As he packed his suitcase there in his hotel room in Brazil, getting ready for the return trip to his home in Europe, he carefully placed the baby reptiles in the false bottom of the bag.
3. The animals were rare and would fetch a lot of money back in Europe, more than paying for his entire vacation in South America.
4. But it was illegal to transport them outside of Brazil, so he had to hide them.
5. What would earn him even more money were the tiny exotic bird eggs he'd purchased.
 - a. Like the reptiles, it was illegal to take them outside the country, but he just couldn't resist.
 - b. The eggs were too fragile to put in the suitcase,
 - c. So he put them in a sock & placed them in his shorts.
6. And there they stayed, safe & *warm* until he arrived back in Europe.
7. Standing in line at Customs, the eggs hatched, & the baby birds began to cry loudly.
8. Customs agents escorted him to an interrogation room where he & his luggage were searched.
9. The prohibited animals were found, and he was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to prison.

B. *Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out*

1. This guy discovered the truth of what Moses said in Numbers 32:23 –

“Be sure your sin will find you out.”
2. And it's a truth that is amply demonstrated in our study today . . .

II. TEXT

A. *Set The Scene*

1. Israel has their first conquest in Canaan under their belt.

2. The mighty fortress of Jericho lies in smoking ruins.
3. God had given the command that as the *first fruits* of their victories Jericho, was to be *totally dedicated* to God.
4. Not a single thing was to be *kept* by the people as spoils of battle. It was all to be offered as a burnt offering.

B. V. 1

¹But 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.

1. This guy Achan, *alone of all the people*, defied the command of God and secretly snagged some of the treasure.
2. But notice how v. 1 labels Achan's rebellion – as a trespass “the children of Israel committed.”
3. Achan isn't seen as *just* an individual – he is a member of the covenant community.
4. What he does, has consequences for others.

C. Vs. 2-5

²Now 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. ³And 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.”

1. Ai was a small city a short distance west of Jericho.
 2. It guarded the main road that led from Jericho up into the central highlands of Canaan.
 3. This was the route Joshua would take to drive a wedge through Canaan, cutting it in half from north to south.
 4. “Ai” means “Heap;” a fitting name for this outpost, set on a small hill above the road.
 5. Ai would prove to be a “heap of trouble” for Israel.
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6. The scouts returned to Joshua with a report saying that Ai would be easy pickings.
 7. After the great victory they'd just witnessed at mighty Jericho,

these guys figured Ai was a breeze.

⁴So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. ⁵And 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.

8. Not a man had been lost in the conquest of Jericho. But now, at little Ai 36 were killed.
9. If the people had been joyous & confident in the victory at Jericho, the pendulum of emotion swung 180 degrees in the other direction with the defeat at Ai.
10. Now they're *terrified!*
 - a. They know word will quickly go out to the other Canaanite cities that Israel isn't as invincible as they thought.
 - b. Her army ran away like scared children.

D. Vs. 6-9

⁶Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads.

1. The leaders realized the danger they were now in.
2. This was a tragic turn of events that left them utterly confused.
3. So they threw themselves on the ground before the ark in desperation.

⁷And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! ⁸O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? ⁹For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear *it*, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

4. Joshua expressed his confusion and concern to God.
5. He knew God had promised him he would lead the nation in the victorious conquest of Canaan.
6. But the defeat at Ai went contrary to what God had said.

7. Joshua did the right thing with his confusion and fear – he took it to God and laid it honestly before the Lord.
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8. Do you get confused?
 - a. Are there times in your walk with God when things don't seem to be lining up with what you know is God's will & what His word says?
 - b. Are there times of fear, when danger is imminent & God seems vacant?
 9. We all go through such seasons of testing – when our circumstances seem to defy the Word & Will of God.
 10. When confusion and fear loom before us, we need to do what Joshua did – Fall on our faces before the Lord and humbly seek Him.
 11. We ought to be honest in expressing our confusion – *not blaming God*, but admitting our need He come and make things right.

E. Vs. 10-15

¹⁰So the LORD said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? ¹¹Israel 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. ¹²Therefore 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.

1. God gave Joshua a *gentle rebuke*.
2. In his confusion & fear, Joshua had assumed that Israel's defeat was the result of some *failure* on God's part.
3. But Joshua ought to have known better – God *cannot* fail.
4. So, if Israel had been defeated, he ought to have known the fault lay with Israel!
5. That's what he learns – someone had violated the prohibition of taking loot from Jericho.
6. This loot had weakened the nation so she *couldn't* stand in battle, no matter how many she sent against Ai.

7. God told Joshua – “Look, *Israel* failed, not Me.”
8. Then He told Joshua how to deal with it.
 - a. The next day they were to cast lots over the people,
 - b. And God would reveal the guilty one.
 - c. [to v. 16]

F. Vs. 16-18

¹⁶So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. ¹⁷He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarahites; and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. ¹⁸Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

1. When I read this, I wonder: Why didn't Achan just step forward & confess?
 - a. when the first lot fell to the tribe of Judah – why didn't he step out and say, “I did it!”
 - b. when the next lot singled out his clan –
 - c. and the next fell to his family, why didn't he come forward?
2. Then I remember - Sin makes you stupid.
3. People think they can *hide* their sin; that they can *get away* with it.
4. ***They can't***. As Numbers 32:23 says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.”
5. In Proverbs 6:27 we find,

Can a man take fire to his bosom and his clothes not be burned?

 - a. Commenting on this, the great preacher Charles Spurgeon said,
 - b. “Coals of fire cannot be concealed beneath the most sumptuous apparel, they will betray themselves with smoke and flame. Neither can pet sins be long hidden beneath the [boldest] profession of faith; they will sooner or later discover themselves, and burn sad holes in a person's reputation. Sin needs quenching in the Savior's blood, not concealing under the garb of religion.”
6. That man who smuggled those exotic bird eggs into Europe

- thought he could keep it secret.
7. He couldn't - because it's the nature of sin to be revealed.
 8. Truth may be obscured *for a time*, but it cannot be ultimately denied.
 9. As Paul says in Romans 1, in the end the truth will *always* come out.
 10. What might have happened if Achan had stepped forward & confessed his sin, as soon as the report of the defeat at Ai had come to the camp at Gilgal?
 - a. Knowing the mercy of God, I have to believe he would have been forgiven.
 - b. Certainly there would have been *consequences* for his disobedience, there always are,
 - c. But God has shown Himself to be patient & forgiving of those who genuinely repentant.
 11. But Achan *didn't* come forward. He *didn't* confess. He stood there acting innocent until the lot fell to him.

G. Vs. 19-23

¹⁹Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide *it* from me." ²⁰And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: ²¹When 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." ²²So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. ²³And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.

1. Now that the game is up, Achan admitted he snatched some of the forbidden things of Jericho.
 - a. When moving through the city he saw a sumptuous garment from Babylon, think of an expensive silk Armani suit.

- b. He stumbled on a treasure of gold & silver.
 - c. All of this he packed up and put in a hiding place in his tent in the camp at Gilgal.
2. Achan admitted that when he saw this stuff, he *coveted* it.
 - a. He couldn't *help* himself.
 - b. His desire for loot overwhelmed his better sense & he snagged it.
 3. This is curious! Just what benefit did Achan think he would gain from this stuff?
 - a. He couldn't *use* it – others would find out he'd taken it.
 - b. What did his secret sin do for him?
 - c. As we'll see, it didn't bring Achan any pleasure or comfort – *only ache*.

 4. Was his admission of sin a genuine confession?
 - a. He uses the right words – V. 20
“Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel . . .”
 - b. Folks, this isn't a heartfelt *confession*–
 - c. It's an *admission* but not a *confession* of what he's done.
 - d. It only comes *after* he's backed into a corner & can't duck the truth any longer.
 - e. If his confession had been *sincere*, he would have stepped forward *earlier*, not only after there was no way to deny the truth.
 5. It's been my sad experience over the years to see people do what Achan does here.
 - a. They're caught up in some secret sin & never step forward to confess & repent of it.
 - b. They experience the truth of Numbers 32:23 when their sin is exposed by circumstances beyond their control.
 - c. And they reluctantly admit to it, but only to what everyone already knows.
 - d. They *say the right words*, admitting they've sinned,
 - e. But they try to shift the responsibility for their sin onto others.
 - 1) The thief blames the store for not putting anti-theft devices on the package.
 - 2) The burglar blames the homeowner for not putting locks on his windows.

- 3) The adulterer blames the spouse for not being for loving.
- 4) The liar blames their victim for being gullible & trusting.
- f. They admit their sin, but always coupled with a “but . . .”
- g. “Yes, I sinned, but . . .”
- 6. That’s what Achan does here.
 - a. Though it’s not brought out in the translation to English,
 - b. The original carries the subtle idea that Achan is saying *he couldn’t help himself*.
 - c. Notice he didn’t just say, “I sinned & took some loot.”
 - d. He said, “Here’s what happened – *let me explain*: When I saw the spoils, I coveted them and took them.”
 - e. In other words – “I couldn’t help myself!”
 - f. And the implication is – “So you can’t really blame me or hold me responsible.”
- 7. Again, if Achan had been *genuinely repentant*, he would have come forward with his confession before being singled out.

H. Vs. 24-26

²⁴Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of [Trouble] Achor. ²⁵And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. ²⁶Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of [Trouble] Achor to this day.

- 1. Everything that belonged to Achan, including his family, was taken to a valley near there and stoned to death, then they set the whole thing on fire.
- 2. Why was Achan’s *family* made to suffer along with him?
 - a. Well, where did they find the loot? In his tent, where the family *lived*.
 - b. They all knew about it and had said nothing. They became co-conspirators in his crime. His sin became theirs.

3. Achan's sin affected & polluted his family.
4. His evil influence as the head of the home brought those under his roof into danger, a danger that was realized in the Valley of Achor.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Lessons from Achan

1. Achan teaches us some crucial lessons about secret sin.
2. **First**, the sin that is secret today, is public tomorrow.
 - a. Numbers 32:23 – “Be sure your sin will find you out.”
 - b. Proverbs 6:27 – “Can a man take fire to his bosom and his clothes not be burned?”
 - c. Secret sin on Earth is Open scandal in Heaven.
 - 1) We may be able to hide our sin from the eyes of other for a time.
 - 2) But God sees, and He loves us too much to let our sin remain secret where it eats at our soul.
 - d. I say it again, Secret sin on Earth is Open scandal in Heaven.
 - e. And sin that is *kept secret* on Earth, *will BECOME* an Open scandal there as well.
 - f. [repent]
3. **Second**, secret sin harms others.
 - a. The one who harbors some secret sin thinks no one will get hurt. But that isn't true – ask Achan.
 - b. Ask anyone who's had an affair.
 - 1) A guy is tempted to begin a tryst, & conscience warns him of the consequences if he's discovered.
 - 2) He says to himself, “Well, If I get caught, I'll just take my lumps.”
 - 3) But it isn't just he who'll suffer.
 - a) His wife will suffer, His kids will pay.
 - b) His friends will hurt.
 - c) His business associates will suffer.
 - c. And if he's a Christian, the reputation of the Church will be tarnished.
 - d. As happened in Israel with Achan's sin, the Body of Christ will be *weakened* and will not be able to stand before its enemies.
 - e. Don't forget that all this began when 3 dozen men died.
 - 1) Achan's seemingly secret, little sin – caused 36 families to

- lose husbands, fathers, & sons.
- 2) Think of how many *millions* were imperiled by Achan's lone act of moral foolishness!
 - 3) Joshua and the leaders recognized the danger – and threw themselves down before the Lord in desperation.
- f. In Romans 14:7 Paul makes this remarkable statement –
- None of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.**
- 1) WE find this in the midst of a passage which says we are all part of the same family.
 - 2) We have an obligation to not only look out for ourselves but for one another.
 - 3) The quality of my spiritual life affects you & yours has an impact on me.
- g. The lie that fosters secret sin is that no one will get hurt.
- 1) But others are hurt – even while the sin is secret.
 - 2) Because that sin is eating holes in the sinner's soul, changing them, marking them with spiritual poison.
 - 3) That poison damages *all a person's relationships*.

B. Romans 6:23

1. We began with Romans 6:23 –
- For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
2. Achan teaches us the truth of the first part of that – the wages of sin *is* death.
 3. But the cross teaches us that while our sin has earned death, God loves us & sent His Son to take our place in judgment.
 4. He now extends the gift of forgiveness to *all who repent*, who turn from sin to Him.
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5. The name Achan means “*Troubler*”
 6. Achor, the place where he was executed means “Trouble”
 7. The troubler met his end in the Valley of Trouble.
 8. For generations after this Valley stood as a memorial to the trouble secret sin brings the People of God.
 9. But in Hosea 2:15 we find a marvelous promise about Israel's future. God says -

I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope;

10. God promised He would turn the Valley of Trouble into a doorway to Hope.
11. That's what the Cross is – the place where our sin is judged in Christ, and where we find forgiveness & hope.

12. Is there something you've been hiding, some sin that has you "achin"?
13. Don't wait till it exposes you, expose it to the light of the Spirit & find forgiveness in Jesus.
14. [To lost]