

INTRODUCTION

Over the past week, the news channels have been going a little crazy over the hunting accident in which Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot his friend. His political opponents have even used this accident as a reason to call for his resignation. There must be some pretty smart people in the bumper sticker business, because this past week, I saw one that said: "I'D RATHER HUNT WITH DICK CHENEY THAN RIDE WITH TED KENNEDY." I guess the moral of that bumper sticker is everyone makes mistakes.

Last week we studied about how Joshua and the children of Israel marched around Jericho 13 times, and then the walls came tumbling down. Can you imagine the celebration that must have taken place that night? The most heavily fortified city of the ancient world had been conquered without losing a single Israeli soldier.

But the first word of Joshua chapter 7 is one of the scariest words in any language: *But*. Whenever you hear the word "but," what follows is usually not very pleasant. Have you ever heard someone say, "I don't want to be critical, BUT..." That means they DO intend to be critical. In Joshua 7, "but" ushers in a sad story of sin and suffering. In this message we are going to learn about the tragedy of an Achan, breakin' heart.

Joshua 7:1-5. "BUT the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zimri, the 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 Aven 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 people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there.' So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six 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 and became like water."

What a tragedy! Joshua immediately fell on his face in prayer to complain to God.

Joshua 7:7. "And Joshua said, 'Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?'"

Don't we do the same thing? When unpleasant things happen, our first question is usually, "Why, God?" But notice God's response.

Joshua 7:10-11. "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.'"

So under God's direction, all the men gathered before Joshua, and they kept narrowing down the men until only one man was left before Joshua—Achan.

Joshua 7:19-21. "Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; 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, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.'"

What happened next was not pretty.

Joshua 7:24-26. "Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had to the Valley of Achor. 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 a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger."

This is a message about how sin can destroy your life. Achan represents a person who has crossed over the Jordan River and entered God's Promised Land, and still stumbled and fell into sin. This story should serve as a powerful lesson to every Christian: *WARNING: SPIRITUAL PRIDE LEADS TO FAILURE!* The Bible says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) Fresh from the victory of Jericho, Joshua and the spies thought Ai would be a pushover. After all, Ai was a little podunk village compared to Jericho. But because of spiritual pride, they were defeated at Ai. It would be like an army conquering Dallas/Ft. Worth, and then being defeated by Arp, Texas.

If you aren't careful, you may find yourself thinking you are beyond the reach of sin. That's a dangerous place to be. There are three truths about sin each of us needs to know.

I. THE DANGEROUS COURSE OF SIN

Sin never sneaks up on you and blinds you—it always follows a predictable course. There are progressive steps or stages to sin that can be traced. In Joshua 7:21 Achan mentions these four dangerous stages of sin.

Stage 1: An innocent temptation

Achan said, "I saw..." During the mop up after the walls fell down, Achan entered a house and saw a robe, some silver, and some gold. Just *seeing* the plunder was not a sin. It was simply a temptation at that point. Achan could have looked away and said, "God said not to take any of the treasure of Jericho, because it is all to be devoted to Him alone." That's resisting temptation.

It is no sin to be tempted. Sometimes a Christian may think something must be wrong with them because wicked thoughts pass through their mind. No, that's the nature of temptation. If you don't allow those thoughts to linger, there is no sin. As Billy Graham once said, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you CAN keep them from building a nest in your hair."

Stage 2: A lustful thought

Next Achan said, "I coveted..." In other words, after he saw the loot, he desired to have it. He couldn't help seeing it the first time, but when he looked again, that's when he crossed the line into sinful desire.

In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Sometimes you may see the possibility to sin, and if you look away, you haven't crossed over the line of sin. But if you begin to fantasize about what it would be like to have that thing, or that person, you have committed the sin of coveting.

Stage 3: The disobedient act

Next Achan said, "I took..." Stage one, temptation isn't a sin. Stage two, coveting is a sin, but there is a world of difference between coveting and actually taking. I say that because through the years, I've sometimes men say, "I had lusted after this certain woman, and since Jesus said I had already committed adultery, I thought, 'What's the difference?' I was already guilty, so I took the next step." That is the height of stupidity. Sin is sin, and all sin must be confessed, but there are totally different consequences to the sin of lusting and the sin of acting. If a man has committed adultery in his heart only, he has sinned against God and needs to confess it to God only. But if he takes the next step, then he has sinned not only against God, he has sinned against that woman, against his mate, and against his family. The differences in the consequences of stage two sin and stage three sin are massive. I'm convinced that if Achan had coveted the treasure, but then not touched it, he would have not been killed.

Stage 4: The dishonest cover-up

Finally, Achan said, "I hid..." Someone once said: To err is human; and to cover it up is too. It is part of our sinful nature to try to cover up and hide our sin. Can you think of an American President who was guilty of wrongdoing and then trying to cover it up? Of course, I'm thinking of Richard Nixon who had knowledge of the Watergate break-in and then tried to cover it up. His fall and resignation came more from the cover up attempt than the crime itself.

Look again at those four stages of sin. They form a slippery slope of failure. You can apply those stages to every sinner. For instance, think about King David and his sin with Bathsheba. First, "I saw..." King David was up on his roof and saw Bathsheba bathing. If he had looked away, his would have resisted temptation and his life and the lives of his family members would have been spared so much pain and suffering. Next, "I coveted..." He found himself desiring Bathsheba. But notice, if he had stopped at that point, he and his family would still have been spared a world of pain. But then "I took..." King David had her brought to his bedroom, and he committed adultery with her. And then finally, "I hid..." King David tried to cover up his sin. Can't you hear him as he said, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." No actually, when she became pregnant, King David brought her husband home in hopes that he would sleep with her. But Uriah was such a patriot that he wouldn't even sleep with his wife while his fellow soldiers were

in battle. So as a last ditch cover-up attempt, King David sent him back to battle with a secret plan to have him killed.

Before we leave this point, let the Holy Spirit engrave this upon your heart: Stop the process at stage one or at least at stage two—or you, and those you love, will suffer. That leads to the next sad truth about sin:

II. THE DESTRUCTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

As we're going to see, God forgives sin—any sin. But there are always consequences to sin—and these consequences are destructive. Notice three consequences:

1. My sin never stays secret

The Bible says, "You may be SURE that your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23) When Achan saw the robe, the silver, and the gold he looked left and he looked right, then he looked behind him and in front of him—nobody was watching. But he forgot God was watching.

The Bible teaches that there is nothing hidden that won't be revealed. Some sin is revealed in this life, and some of it is revealed in the life to come. I read with great sadness this week about the three men who were arrested in East Texas. They had used an internet chat room to communicate with who they thought was a 13-year-old girl. They arranged to meet her for sex, and when they arrived at the location, they discovered it was sting operation and they were arrested. That shouldn't surprise us; that's what the Bible promises. Your sins will find you out. Guys, you think nobody knows about those porn sites you're visiting—God knows. Friend, are you involved in some questionable relationship with someone in a chat room? You make think it is harmless, but it can easily ruin your life.

2. My sin always hurts others

You may think your sin only affects your life, but it always affects others. Your sins are like a pebble dropped in a pool of water—the ripples always spread out and touch those around you. Because of Achan's sin, 36 soldiers died. Because of Achan's sin, his entire family died. Alan Redpath wrote: "One individual in the camp had betrayed God's trust, and the verdict from heaven was not, 'Achan hath sinned,' but 'Israel hath sinned.' One man had failed, and the whole army was defeated. Where one member of a local fellowship is guilty before God of sin, the verdict from heaven is, 'My people have sinned.'" Sometimes people try to justify sin by saying, "It's my life, as long as what I'm doing doesn't hurt anybody else what's wrong with it?" The problem with that is that none of us lives in a vacuum. We are connected to other people and our sins always hurt those we love.

3. My sin blocks my prayers

When Joshua was on his face in prayer, God told him, "What are you doing praying? Get up—there's sin in the camp. Deal with the sin; then you can come back and talk to me." The Bible teaches that sin can hinder our prayer life. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I had cherished sin in my heart,

the Lord would not have listened." That word "cherished" means to fondle, like you would caress your favorite pet. If you have some kind of "pet sin" that you're hanging onto and stroking, don't expect God to be answering your prayers. If you have unconfessed sin in your life, whenever you pray, God says the same thing to you that He said to Joshua, "Get up! There's sin in your life! Deal with the sin, then come and talk to me."

Don't ever forget—sin always has consequences. Even for sin that God has forgiven, you still have to deal with the consequences. You need to know that sin will take you farther than you ever wanted to go; it will keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay; and it will cost you more than you ever wanted to pay.

III. THE DIVINE CURE FOR SIN

That's the bad news. But the Bible never stops with the bad news. God *does* have a cure for sin. If you have an Achan heart, there are three things you need to understand if you want to benefit from God's cure for sin.

1. Develop a radical hatred toward sin

As we read this story, were you a little upset about how harshly God dealt with Achan and his family? Achan and his family, his livestock and all his property were stoned and burned. It's a reminder to us of just how much God hates sin. It says in Joshua 7:26, "Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger."

I'd like to sugarcoat this story and say that after Achan confessed, God forgave him and everything was fine and dandy. But God is God. And He possesses a fierce anger toward sin. He *always* punishes sin. At this critical time in the life of Israel, He demonstrated a radical response to sin. You may be thinking, "I don't like that picture of the Old Testament God who was so harsh and angry toward sin." Sorry, but you don't have the freedom to create your own sentimental concept of a sweet, tolerant God who never offends anyone. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. Do you recall how God responded to a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? They bragged to Peter and the church that they were giving a certain amount of money, but they were lying and holding back on God. They dropped dead right there on the spot. Again, this was such an important time in the life of the beginning church that God displayed His radical hatred toward sin.

You will never have victory over sin in your life until you start hating sin in your life, the same way God hates sin. Imagine for a moment you have one child, and as you arrive home one day you see your child lying face down in the backyard. You rush out to investigate, and as you pick up your child, you realize your child is cold, stiff, and lifeless. Upon hearing the noise of rustle, you look to see a four foot rattlesnake coiled on the ground. As you notice the two swollen puncture marks on your child's neck, you realize this poisonous snake has killed him. Now, what is going to be your reaction toward that snake? If it was me, I would take my shotgun and shoot the snake, and reload and shoot it again. I would chop it up and burn it. That's how intense my hatred would be to the thing that killed my child.

Do you know what killed Jesus, the precious only Son of God? It wasn't the nails in His hands and feet, or the spear in His side—it was sin that killed Jesus—my sin and your sin. When you realize this, then you begin to understand why God hates sin so much.

Just as Achan was executed, the New Testament teaches that we have to put to death the sinful selfish nature that we have. Romans 8:13 says, "If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live." Just as you'd want to crush and kill a snake that killed your child, you must have such an intense hatred toward sin you are willing to allow your flesh to be crucified every day.

2. Practice both confession and repentance

Achan made a confession, but he never repented. He only confessed when he was caught red handed. There was no remorse or sorrow over his sin. Some people today think confession is something you do when you get caught. And for many people, the only thing they're sorry about is that they got caught.

The Bible says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever CONFESSES and RENOUNCES them finds mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)

The Bible says we must confess sins and forsake them. The word "confess" means "to say the same thing." In other words, when you confess your sin, you agree with God that a specific thought or action was wrong. But you must also be willing to turn from your sin—that's repentance. That's why "blanket confession" is useless. Have you ever heard anyone say, "Lord, if I have sinned, forgive me?" We must be willing to specifically confess our sins so that we can know what it is we need to change.

In order to walk in fellowship with God, you must practice *both* confession and repentance. This truth can be illustrated in the lives of two disciples, Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter. Judas betrayed Jesus, and he later confessed. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the Jewish leaders and said, "I have betrayed innocent blood." But he never repented, and he went out and killed himself. On the other hand, Simon Peter cursed and denied the Lord—not once, but three times. And the Bible says he went out and wept bitterly, and then we see he returned to followers of Jesus. So, it takes more than confession—there must also be repentance.

3. Accept God's cleansing

All Israel was guilty because of Achan's sin, but God forgave Israel, and gave them another chance. In Chapter 8, they go up against Ai and are victorious. He is the God of the second and third and fourth chance!

When we sin, we must follow the directions found in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Each of us has a sin problem (singular). And we have a problem with sins (plural). When you trusted Christ for salvation, He dealt with your sin problem. You were forgiven. That means He took away the penalty of your sin—which is separation from God forever in a place called Hell. Forgiveness

establishes your relationship with God. When you become a Christian, you are a child of God and that relationship can never be broken. However, you must continually confess your sins in order to maintain a proper fellowship with God. When you confess your daily sins, you can experience cleansing and walk in fellowship with God. Nobody is perfect, but you can be clean before the Lord.

But you must believe you are forgiven! Satan is the accuser of the brethren and he wants to make you think you're still guilty after you've been forgiven and cleansed. Sometimes we get a little confused with these Bible doctrines like confession, repentance, justification, and sanctification. Here are three phrases anybody can remember. This is what you need to do when you've sinned: ADMIT IT—that's confession. QUIT IT—that's repentance. Then FORGET IT—because God has forgotten it, so can you!

CONCLUSION

The reason we're studying the book of Joshua is to learn you *can* make the leap from good to great by moving into spiritual Canaan. You *don't* have to do like they did and wander in the spiritual wilderness for 40 years. You *don't* have to give in to temptation and suffer the way Achan did. I mentioned earlier that God always has to punish sin—that fact has been woven in the very fabric of His universe. But you don't have to face the personal punishment for your sins the way Achan did. You have a choice he didn't.

Go back in your mind with me to that field outside the camp of Israel. Imagine with me Achan has just finished confessing his crime. Then he and his family are lined up and the people are ready to start stoning them to death. Suddenly there's a shout, "Wait!" Joshua walks up to Achan and says, "You are guilty. You were caught red-handed with the loot, and you deserve to die. But instead of having the people stone you, I'm going to take your place. While I am stoned, you and your family stand over there in a safe place." Once Achan and his family are safely to the side, Joshua raises his head and says, "Let the stoning begin!" And then, as the stones rain down on Joshua, just before he dies, he lifts his bloody head and says, "It is finished!"

Obviously that didn't happen. Achan didn't have that choice, because Joshua didn't have the authority to die for Achan's sins. But remember the Old Testament name *Yashua* is the New Testament name "Jesus." And that's exactly what Jesus did for me and for you. Like Achan we stand guilty before God. We deserve to die for our sins. But Jesus stepped in and took my place. God's fierce anger and hatred towards sin was dealt at the cross.

As Dottie Rambo's classic old song says, "I was guilty with nothing to say; They were coming to take me away; But then a voice was heard that said that day; Let him go, take me instead; And I should have been crucified; I should have suffered and died; I should have hung on that cross in disgrace; But Jesus, God's Son took my place!"

OUTLINE

I. THE DANGEROUS COURSE OF SIN

Stage 1: Innocent temptation ("I saw")

Stage 2: Lustful thought ("I coveted")

Stage 3: Disobedient act ("I took")

Stage 4: Dishonest cover-up ("I hid")

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes