

## INTRODUCTION

Last week we talked about how Joshua DIDN'T fight the battle of Jericho. Per God's instructions, the Israelites marched around Jericho for six days without saying a word and went back home. On the seventh day they marched around the most heavily fortified city of the ancient world six times, and on the seventh time when they finished that circle, they blew the trumpets and the people shouted and the walls of Jericho collapsed. God brought the walls down. God had given very specific instructions. "When you go into the city, don't you dare plunder the city! Don't take any of the goods the valuables of the people because we're going to take all of those and set them aside—they are devoted for the work of God." It was an easy victory. After the walls fell down, there was such disorder, the Israeli army simply marched in and mopped up.

But there was one particular Israelite named Achan and as he was looking in one house he saw beneath the rubble the beautiful colors of an imported Babylonian garment. He realized it was very valuable. Then, beside it he saw a piece of silver weighing over five pounds. Then, beside that there was a wedge of pure gold. He picked it up. It weighed a pound and a half. He remembered what God said but he looked to the left and he looked to the right and didn't see anybody else so I imagine he pushed it up under the rubble and covered it up maybe with that garment and spread a little dirt over it. He went back to his tent and that night when everybody was sleeping, he slipped out of his tent, slithered over the ruins, went back to his spot where he had hidden his booty and he dug it out. He laid out the Babylonian garment and put the gold and the silver inside it and wrapped it up and hid it the best he could. He looked to the left, looked to the right; nobody saw him and under the cover of darkness he slipped back into his tent. When he got back into his tent, he dug a hole under his mat and put the garment, gold and silver in the hole and covered it up. He laid down on his mat and said, "Whew! Got away with that! I'm set for the rest of my life. I'm going to be independently wealthy! I've got all the money I need for the rest of my life."

The next day the Israelites realized the next city they had to attack was a little two-lettered city named Ai and some people pronounce it "A-I," but in Hebrew it's most often pronounced "I" and they realized that compared to Jericho, Ai was just a little podunk town. They had conquered Jericho! What is Ai? That's like after whipping Dallas you go down to Arp. We're talking about just that kind of a step down. So they said "We don't even need a full force of men. Let's just take about 3,000." So they sent 3,000 cocky, self-confident Israelites to this little town. And surprise of surprises! They were routed by the enemy! Thirty-six Israelites were killed and the rest of them came running back to the Israelite camp like a bunch of whipped dogs with their tails between their legs yelping all the way! Joshua says, "What in the world is going on? I thought we were going to be able to take this land easily!"

Joshua 7:6-8, 10-12. "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown 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, 'Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us in to the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?' ... 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."

Let me just tell you what happened next. God said, "Joshua, stop your praying! The problem is sin! We have to deal with this sin." and God came up with an ingenious method. He said, "Tomorrow morning I want you to gather all the Israelites out in a valley." Now, how many were there? Believe it or not some people say there were as many as million Israelites others say a million and a half others say perhaps the smallest number it could have been was like 750,000. How in the world could you gather that many people together? They blew trumpets and all of them gathered together. Then God said, "I'm going to name the tribe and everyone else can go home." So, all of them gathered and God said, "Everybody except the tribe of Judah can go home." They went home. Then out of the tribe of Judah he said, "Okay, everybody except this one clan can leave." and everybody left. Then he said, "Okay, everybody in this clan can leave except for this family." When we are talking about a family we're talking about still maybe a thousand people. Everybody else can go. Then, out of all those family members, somehow God pointed out Achan as the man. And Achan was caught, literally, with the gold dust, and the silver dust, and the garment dust on his hands. After finally he is pointed out as being guilty after he is caught, after he is confronted he is the guilty one, he finally he comes clean.

Joshua 7:20. "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 Babylon, 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.'"

Tonight I want to talk to you about the tragedy of "secret" sin. The reason I put quotes around it is because no sin is secret. You just think it is secret. Achan thought what he did was a personal "secret" sin. I don't want you to think so much about Achan tonight and I don't want you to think so much about any other person who might have committed the kind of sin we are talking about tonight and covered it up. I want you to discover if there is any hidden secret sin in your life tonight.

## **I. THE PATTERN OF "SECRET" SIN**

### **1. I saw**

The first thing I want to talk about is the pattern of secret sin. How does it happen? There is a progression or pattern it follows and we see it in what Achan said in verses 20 and 21. I believe every time a person falls into sin, they follow these four steps Achan mentions. The first thing he said was, "I saw it. I saw the gold. I saw the robe. I saw the silver." We call that "an innocent observation." If Achan had only looked at that and said, "Hey, there's some gold, there's some silver, there's a robe and all of that is devoted to the Lord's work, so no problem I'll turn that information into my superiors," or if he had taken it and turned it in everything would have been

okay. When we look at something that could be sin, just to look at it is not sin! In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about something he called a “lustful look.” He said it is possible for a man to look upon a woman with lust in his heart. That means you can look at an attractive female and if you just innocently observe that person, no problem. That’s not a sin. There’s nothing wrong with that. But if you look the second time and the third time and start saying, “What if?” it can lead to sin. I think what Jesus was saying is it’s not that first look that gets you in trouble, it’s that lingering look, that second look. If Achan had merely glanced at that stuff and said, “Well, there it is,” and gone on, there would have been no problem. He said number one “I saw it!” that’s just an innocent observation.

## **2. I coveted**

Do you know what the second step is in a “secret sin”? He said, “I coveted!” We call that “a sinful desire.” To covet something means to want to have something so desperately you are willing to do just about anything to get it. The Tenth Commandment says, “You shall not covet!” To covet means to have such an intense lust and desire to have something or someone that if necessary you will break the rules to get it. This is what Achan did. He looked—nothing wrong with that innocent observation—but then he had a *desire*. He said, “I want that for myself!” That’s the way sin works in our lives. There is the temptation itself, the look. It’s presented to you the opportunity to do something wrong and for you to look at that as an opportunity or as a possibility is not sin! It’s what you do with it. If when you are presented with a temptation, you take the next step and say, “I want to do that!” Then, it becomes lust. It becomes sinful desire.

## **3. I took**

Here’s the third step. He said, “I saw it. I coveted it. I took it!” That is the disobedient act. He disobeyed the word of God! Some people think he didn’t commit the sin until he actually put his hands on those things and stole them. But the Bible says in the New Testament “When he looked and lusted” at the point of lusting it wanting it that’s where the sin was. He took it.

## **4. I hid**

In the fourth step he said, “I hid it in my tent beneath the ground.” That’s a dishonest cover-up! Look at the pattern. That’s pretty much the way sin operates in everybody’s life. You see something, there’s nothing wrong with that. But then if you say, “Oh I really want that” and then you actually do it, you’ll find yourself having to lie to cover it up. There are people in America who would be quicker to forgive our President of what he did if from the beginning he had just told the truth about it! If he had been honest about it and said, “Yes that’s what I did.” But the lies are a totally different issue. That is just the pattern followed all throughout the Bible and even into today.

I can give you a lot of examples. In the Garden of Eden, Eve said, “I saw the fruit and it was pleasing to my eyes.” She said, “I desired to have it!” Lust. She said, “I ate it!” and then when God came walking through the Garden, she hid herself. There it is: She saw it she wanted it she took it she hid!

What about King David? One night he was walking out on the balcony of his palace there in Jerusalem and he looked down so he had a good view of that part of Jerusalem and he saw a woman taking a bath. I heard a speaker say one time that Bathsheba probably knew David was watching her. Well there's no reason to think the Bible says that. That's very demeaning to Bathsheba. We don't know that. David looked down and saw a naked woman and she was beautiful. You know to accidentally just look at somebody like that he can't help it, but he didn't turn away. But he looked again and he kept on looking, and he lusted. "I want that woman!" He had her sent for. They brought Bathsheba up into his chambers and he took her. Then, when she became pregnant, he brought her husband, Uriah, back and tried to get Uriah to go in and sleep with his wife so when everybody found out she was pregnant, they would say, "Oh, that happened when he came home from battle!" but Uriah was such a patriot he said, "When my compatriots are up there on that line, how can I sleep with my wife?" And he wouldn't go inside the house. So David sent Uriah back and had him killed. He hid it. He tried to cover it up.

## II. THE PAIN OF "SECRET" SIN

### 1. You're living in defeat

I don't know what there is in your background. I don't know what there is in your present experience, but if you have gone through or you are going through anything like this, you are following the pattern. It is a pattern in the Bible that leads to pain, suffering, and destruction. That's the second thing I want to talk about, the pain of "secret" sin. It's not really secret! Our personal sin causes ruin and defeat in our lives. They had conquered Jericho, but because there was sin present in the camp, they went out and were defeated. In the book of Romans, it says, "We are to be more than conquerors through him that loves us." in other words we ought to be living and walking and breathing in victory in Jesus. I promise you, that when there is personal sin in your life—and I am talking to Christians—Achan was a child of God, he was part of the nation of Israel, he was in the body and when a Christian is practicing some kind of sinful deceit and sinful lifestyle, you won't be more than a conqueror you'll be living in defeat! You're living in ruin. There won't be any spiritual victories in your life. You won't have a victory over your temper. You won't have a victory over your mouth. You won't have a victory in your relationships. It will be one A-I after another. You'll be running in defeat. If you're wondering, "Why am I not living the victorious Christian life? Why am I not claiming all of these blessings God has promised?" In the first place, you had better look and see if there is any personal sin in your life see if there is anything you are hiding.

### 2. It hurts those around us

The second thing that causes pain from personal sin is it hurts those around us. My sin and your sin hurts all of those other people around us. The amazing thing about this incident is Achan was one individual who committed this sin but God said, "*Israel* has sinned. There is sin in the camp." Thirty-six men died because of the sin of one man. None of us lives our life in isolation. Every time you sin it is literally like a pebble dropped into a calm surface of water and the ripples extend in concentric circles and touches people all around us. Your sin and my sin will always hurt those around us. There is fallout from sin after the explosion that is at least as deadly as the sin itself.

There is a European fable that tries to teach some kind of moral lesson. It is about a mother eagle. She lived in a land where the people made sacrifices to this god. This god had ordered all the sacrifices; no one else was to destroy those sacrifices. They were only to be offered to that local god. This mother eagle had laid some eggs in her nest on the top of a crag of a mountain. Her eggs hatched and she had two baby eaglets. This mother eagle had a hard time trying to find food to feed her eaglets. She flew over the altar they had built to this god and she saw they had placed meat on it and the meat was burning. It was offered to this god and forbidden for anyone else to touch. The eagle knew the rules but she had such a desire to feed her own children, she gave in to her temptation. One day she swooped down and grabbed it with her strong talons and flew quickly with it back to her nest, not realizing that embedded into that flesh was a hot coal. When she dropped the meat to her eaglets, the nest caught on fire and her eaglets were burned. I don't know the moral of that story other than to say that sometimes when we disobey the rules we hurt those around us in doing so. That's what Achan did and that's what our sin does. It hurts those around us it hurts our family members it hurts our friends it hurts our church.

### **3. It hinders prayer**

Here's the third thing regarding the pain of secret sin: It hinders prayer. Here is Joshua on his knees on his face before God saying, "Oh, God, help me God. Help us, Lord." God says, "Get up! Get up! What are you doing praying? There is sin in the camp. There's a problem. Get off your knees and stop praying until you do something about this sin problem!" Do you have any trouble praying anytime? Do you ever feel like your prayers are not getting past the light bulbs? In Psalm 66:18, the psalmist says, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." That phrase *cherished sin* is a phrase literally meaning *embraced sin*. This is the picture of a person who has a secret pet sin. Something like we call a "little white lie"—no harm in it. You hang on to that little pet sin and you cherish it and you embrace it and you cuddle it. But God says, "If you're hanging onto some little pet sin, you might as well not even pray!" God says, "I'm not going to listen to you!" What audacity, to go before a holy God when you know you are hanging onto sin and ask him to bail you out ask him to help you! Do you know what he says to you and me? "Get up off your knees! Get up off your face! Deal with the sin in your life if you want your prayers to be unhindered!"

### **4. It never remains a secret**

Here's the fourth thing. Our personal sin never remains a secret. There is no such thing as "secret" sin. Jesus says in Luke 12, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs."

Old Achan thought he was okay didn't he? "I've gotten away with this. Nobody knows about it." Sure you cheated on your income tax and you think nobody knows about it. God knows about it! You have that secret thought life, that secret fantasy life you think nobody knows about. God knows about it! There is no such thing as "secret" sin. Can you imagine old Achan standing out there in the valley of Achor? Let's say there were three million Israelites. He's thinking "Hey, one in three million what's the chance?" "Every other tribe except Judah go home." Maybe it

was cut down to one hundred thousand. "One in a hundred thousand a needle in a haystack." Then it was cut down to a clan maybe ten thousand. "One in ten thousand" Then it was cut down to a family maybe "one in a thousand." Don't you know old Achan started getting a little bit nervous and started sweating when Joshua walked right up to him? "You're the man!" just like Nathan did to David. "Thou art the man!" When Achan was confronted and caught, he confessed.

You say, "Well, good for him! He confessed!" No it was bad for him, because he waited until he was caught before he confessed. Read the rest of the chapter—it is not pretty. They stoned Achan, his wife, his children and all his livestock to death. All I can say to you is I think Achan waited too late to confess, until the consequences were so severe he couldn't deal with it. I think even after Achan had stolen that stuff and hidden it under his tent, if he had given in to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and he had gone to Joshua and said, "Listen, Joshua. I want to confess to you. I stole some gold and silver and a robe and it was wrong and I am sorry." If he had confessed it at that time, I don't think for one moment he would have been killed. He waited too late until everybody knew about it! That's not true repentance. That's not true confession once you have been caught. What he thought was a secret was no secret. What you think is a secret is no secret. 1 Timothy 5:24 says, "The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them." That means there are some sins everybody knows about and the judgement comes right then. For example, if I shot David Riddle, you would tackle me, arrest me and I would be judged, because that was something everybody would have seen. It would have been in the open. There are some sins we commit we think nobody knows about them, that just follows us to judgement. "You mean judgement sending us to Hell?" No. For Christians the Judgement Seat of Christ and I don't know all that it means but it just says, "It follows us to judgement." Do you think you are getting away with it?

## CONCLUSION

I want to close with telling you about my college roommate Warren. He is a pastor now but he went through some rough times. The night of his high school graduation he and a bunch of guys went out and started drinking. Then they wanted to get into a little trouble and one of these boys' fathers was the manager of a grocery store. I guess they trusted people more back then, but about 4:30 in the morning the kid said, "Hey, the bread truck delivers all the bread to my dad's grocery store at about this time 4:30 in the morning and they just set it out on the sidewalk. It's just sitting out on the sidewalk until the store opens about 6:00. Let's go get some!" So these guys pulled up in this car and there was all this bread sitting out there. They started loading the car down, stealing this bread. They stole bread, pies, cinnamon rolls and they took off having a great time. They said they were driving along stuffing themselves with all the bread and cinnamon rolls and everything else that they could eat. They were so full, they couldn't eat anything else. They were driving down a two-lane highway and started having a little fun. They started holding these pies out the window and when they saw headlights coming, they started throwing these pies at the oncoming cars. They were whooping it up and having a great time and getting pretty good at it. After they had hit 5 or 6 cars, my friend Warren said he was in the back seat and here comes these two headlights and he timed it just right. WHAP!!! He was certain he got that pie right in the middle of the windshield! They looked behind them and saw the brake lights come on and simultaneously blue lights come on. That car turned around, the siren came on and caught

up with them. They pulled over. My friend, Warren, said stepping out of that car is the biggest, angriest state trooper he had ever seen in his life. These guys thought they were getting away with it. They were having a good time but they didn't get away with anything and they got in a lot of trouble for what they did. We think we are getting away with some of these things we think nobody knows about them but we need to remember Achan, because there is no such thing as secret sin!

## OUTLINE

### I. THE PATTERN OF "SECRET" SIN

1. I saw
2. I coveted
3. I took
4. I hid

### II. THE PAIN OF "SECRET" SIN

1. You're living in defeat
2. It hurts those around you
3. It hinders prayer
4. It never remains a secret



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes