

Hidden Sin 5-25-03

Joshua 7

Last fall we studied the journey of the Israelites to and across the Jordan River, and to the fall of Jericho. With all the seasonal and special messages we never made it back to the story that followed. Today we'll look at the story that followed the victory over Jericho. Let's turn to Joshua 7. Please follow along as I read the chapter.

In the first verse we read of the devoted things. There is an important principle of Firstfruits in the battle of Jericho. God often asked Israel for the first thing that was produced. He asked for the firstborn males to be devoted to Him. He asked for the first part of the harvest. It was a demonstration of trust being placed in God who gives all good things and who will provide their needs in the future. If we can trust God with the first of the good things that come our way, we won't be tempted to withhold what follows. There was a huge factor of trust in this principle. Imagine giving back your first car to the Lord? How about your first house? Your first paycheck? We usually desire and expect the most from the first of any type of thing we obtain. Giving the first helps to keep a godly perspective on all that follows.

Jericho was the first victory in the Promised Land. God defeated Jericho with little help. They just marched around and blew trumpets. When the walls came down, there was all the wealth of the city for the taking, but God said it belonged to Him. The Israelites were to burn it as sign that it was irrevocably given to God. It was like an offering. The smoke went up to the Lord. There had to be, what is the equivalent today of, millions of dollars of goods.

Achan probably laid eyes on the goods he took and thought in his mind what a waste it would be to just burn these valuables. John tells us that the lust of our eyes will get us in trouble every time (1John 2:15-17). It is our connection with the world. These goods would probably total thousands of dollars today. The wording used for the robe may indicate it was a kingly robe of many colors.

What would you do if you came on a stash like that and God told you to burn it? We would want to have our hearing checked first, but Achan knew Joshua didn't have a hearing problem. He had miraculously crossed the Jordan and seen God take Jericho. He had seen his elders die in the wilderness because of their unbelief, but his covetousness got the best of him. Surely no one else was looking. If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there does it make a sound? If you take something and no one ever finds out what difference will it make?

The tree does make a sound! It does make a difference! Every act of rebellion against God makes a difference in this world where good and evil are in pitched battle for the souls of man. No man lives to himself and none of us dies to himself (Romans 14:7). No man is an island. We do affect other lives even when they don't interact with ours.

Achan thought his deed would never be found out. He thought God would not respond to his sin. As long as it stayed hidden under the floor of his tent, who would ever

Commented [notes1]: 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.
17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.
1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.
Romans 14:7 (NIV)

know? What's the difference? The strangest thing to me is that he thought God would not deal with him. God dealt with his parents. God was dealing with the Canaanites, but he saw it all as happenstance. We often get caught up in the same kind of thinking. The temptation is to think that God doesn't care. Surely God isn't concerned about one little robe and some precious metals. No, He really isn't, but He is concerned about our hearts. It is a test of the condition of our heart. It's not about the money! It's about your attitude toward it and how that affects what God is doing!

Achan's heart said that Achan deserved the things more than God, or that God was not able to see his sin. Either way, Achan is blaspheming God. That is what all of us do when we sin. We say we are more important than God, or God doesn't care about the details. He knows the number of hairs on our heads. He gave us life and the opportunity to have new life. He gives us everything we have. How can He allow us to show our ingratitude by taking the few things He requests be dedicated to Him? He could ask for it all. He deserves it all. But He only asks for a portion and that for our sake. Achan's response, "No! I want it!" The children of Israel were about to inherit homes they did not build, fields they did not plant, flocks they did not raise, and the spoil from dozens of cities, but Achan wanted it now. Isn't that just like the heart of man? That's why credit cards are one of the biggest businesses in America. We don't wait until we can afford it. Giving into covetousness is the quickest road to bankruptcy, but waiting on God ends in sufficiency.

James describes what took place in the heart of Achan, or any person who gives in to ungodly desires. James 1:15 (NIV) *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.* He saw something. His heart desired it. His mind contemplated whether or not he could get away with it. He made a conscious choice to disobey God. His body acted on it, and then he tried to hide the fact of what he had done by burying it under his tent. Hiding it shows he knew it was wrong!

God says that he lied (verse 11). We don't have any record of a spoken lie. This is a sin of omission. The nation believes all the booty of war was burned. Someone is not telling the truth when they silently let others believe what they know is not true. "My denial of my sin protects, preserves, perpetuates that sin! Ugliness in me, while I live in illusions, can only grow the uglier."

-- Walter Wangerin, Jr., in *Reliving the Passion*

Joshua gets ready to take the next town in their conquest of Canaan. It is a little town called Ai. After spying it out, they think, "No problem. Don't bother the whole army. A few thousand guys should handle it. After all, look what God did with Jericho. God fights for us!" They march into battle and the men of Ai put them to flight. In the fighting of that day, whoever backed down and ran was the army that took the casualties. Israel lost their nerve, and thirty-six men died.

When Joshua heard about the defeat, he fell on his face before the tabernacle. Joshua 7:7-9 (NIV) *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? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what can I*

say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? 9 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?"

His prayer sounds a bit like the generation that died in the wilderness. Remember that he is just getting his leadership wings and hasn't been at this long. He has one thing right though. He knows God is concerned about His great name. God has a testimony. When the people of God don't act like the people of God, it reflects poorly on God. God never changes, but men who claim to live for God affect the world's perception of God.

I like God's answer. *"Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"*

Joshua 7:10b (NIV) In affect God said, "There is sin in the camp and I can't bless disobedience." (Isaiah 59:2) God was not going to allow victory over the enemy when the people of God were guilty of the same thing – idolatry. But wasn't it just Achan? We are all connected. The Apostle Paul reminds us we are one body. When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one member is sick, the body fights the sickness with a fever that affects the whole body. (1Corinthians 12:26) Here we see one man's sin stopped the whole nation from going forward, in obedience to God, into all the good things God had for them.

Commented [notes3]: 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. Isaiah 59:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 1 Cor 12:26 (NIV)

One of the sad trends in today's church at large is the lack of community. Some of the third world doesn't have the problem like we do. We all rush off and go our own ways until the next Sunday. That is why we are going to have fellowship time through the Summer after the service starting next week. I encourage you to take the time to get to know someone you aren't familiar with. Share your burdens, and pray together. Go to lunch with someone you don't know, or have them over for a desert, and don't forget to be involved in one of the Bible studies. Let's have a potluck after the service on the second Sunday of June. Let's get to know one another, share the concerns and victories in your life. In our Wednesday night Bible study we pray together for each other's needs. Whether we realize it or not, we all affect one another.

Wayside will not be the church the Lord intends it to be until we come together in a united desire to surrender to the Lordship of Christ. That results in a community of believers who are genuinely concerned about one another. I have a burning desire for genuine revival in me first and then in you and then in Wayside and then in Sedona and then in the Verde Valley. I don't care what it looks like or how God does it, I just want us to know and realize that God is real and capable and involved right here and now. I long to see lives transformed so that we in turn touch the community with the love of Christ. It has to start with each of us forsaking the hidden sins. It has to start with genuine repentance. That is a forsaking of what you know is not of God, because you know God is worthy of our total obedience out of love.

God deals with us individually, but He also deals with us corporately. It's true that any group will not be more spiritual than its leadership, but it is also true that any group is no stronger than the weakest link. Achan's hidden sin was holding the nation back. He was stopping God from justly going before their army. We are in a spiritual war. Our effectiveness is directly related to the spiritual relationship of God with each one in our fellowship. I don't know about you, but it makes me want to be as close to the Lord as I can be. I want to hear and obey, so that I am not slowing down the work of God, so

I'm not keeping revival at bay. We can't just pretend everything is ok when we know there is hidden sin. It costs too much! Let me share an illustration of the danger of ignoring the problem.

"Scores of people lost their lives. The world's mightiest army was forced to abandon a strategic base. Property damage approached a billion dollars. All because the sleeping giant, Mount Pinatube in the Philippines, roared back to life after six hundred years of quiet slumber.

When asked to account for the incredible destruction caused by this volcano, a research scientist from the Philippines Department of Volcanology observed, 'When a volcano is silent for many years, our people forget that it's a volcano and begin to treat it like a mountain.'

Like Mount Pinatube, our sinful nature always has the potential to erupt, bringing great harm both to ourselves and to others. The biggest mistake we can make is to ignore the volcano and move back onto what seems like a dormant 'mountain.'"

(Stephen Schertzinger in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching)

Achan was camping on a volcano!

The Lord commanded Joshua to have the tribes present themselves to determine the tribe and family from which the guilty man came. It came down to a relative of Joshua, and Joshua continued as God pointed out the individual man. Don't you know Achan was sweating bullets! 36 men dead and someone was responsible through disobedience to God. The text doesn't say how God pointed out which one He was pointing to, but if it was by lot, imagine Joshua's hand going into the jar and pulling out the stone with Achan's name on it. Too bad the UN inspectors didn't have Joshua's relationship with the LORD. Where are the WMDs? Draw lots for the cities, etc.

Joshua confronted his relative. Josh 7:19 (NIV) *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."*

Give glory to the LORD! Give Him the praise! The glory is the honor and obedience due Him. He is worthy of the praise of life of obedience. Glory and praise are more than just words. It must be actions. If the heart is submitted, giving glory to God, recognizing all praise is His, then the actions should follow. Joshua is telling Achan to get right with God through confession of the truth of what he had done. Achan confessed, but was still responsible for the death of the 36 men in the battle for Ai. He still was executed for "troubling Israel". His family was probably aware of his treachery and therefore responsible with him.

They named the valley where he was buried, Achor – which is very similar to Achan's name. Some passages refer to him as Achar (1Chronicles 2:7). The word in Hebrew means *to trouble, stir up*,—*Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*. We would use the term 'troublemaker', today. From then on, it was called the valley of the troublemaker.

What should we learn from the hidden sin of Achan? Sin is never worth the price that is paid, and the price that is paid comes from the whole community of believers. The Bible warns us that we can be sure our sin will find us out (Numbers 32:23). Hidden sin is

Commented [notes5]: 7 The son of Carmi: Achar, who brought trouble on Israel by violating the ban on taking devoted things.
1 Chron 2:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 23 But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.
Num 32:23 (KJV)

not hidden from God (Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 90:8). We are connected to one another in a greater way than we realize. My decisions and actions affect the rest of the body with whom I worship. I can slow the work of God, cause loss amongst the people of God, through my disobedience. I might think something is hidden and not affecting others, but it is. Like Mount Pinatube, the power of that evil will grow if left hidden, waiting for the chance to erupt and damage many lives. Don't allow the sight of something to capture your heart and mind. Be satisfied with Jesus.

On the positive side, if you deepen your walk with Christ, you bless the entire body of believers. As much as you want to see the church touch this city with the love of Jesus, we should make an effort see that our spiritual life is in order. Let's grow together in community, and deepen our relationship with the Lord. Let's be careful of temptations that claim they can be hidden and not affect others. Let us consider our interconnectedness as the body of Christ, and do all we can to keep it healthy and strong. Amen? If we want to see God move here and the community affected, we have to begin by dealing with our hidden sins.

Commented [notes7]: 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. Psalms 90:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Heb 4:13 (NIV)