

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (25-5-1975 Strandtown Baptist Church)

Achan
Joshua 7

Introduction

After Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, crossing the Red Sea, they celebrated the Passover, and God miraculously enabled them to take Jericho. Next they went to the village of Ai – and suffered defeat. They were astonished and bewildered. They had to learn a very common lesson, that progress and success yesterday does not mean progress and success today. They may be followed by defeat and failure.

What was the cause of this defeat? It could have been self-confidence, for they had sent fewer men than they could have. They may have under-rated the enemy's power. Maybe it was because Joshua had stayed at the camp instead of leading the army. Was it that they did not seek God's help and guidance? God revealed to them the true cause – it was not simply self-confidence, failure to lead and failure to ask God's help. God revealed that there was an accursed thing in the camp – a sin, a secret sin, that had been committed, cherished and had gone unconfessed.

Sin committed

What was the trouble about? Achan had found the spoils of war in Jericho – a goodly Babylonish garment, 200 shekels of silver, a wedge of gold of 50 shekels weight. They may have been nothing in themselves, but they represented a treacherous departure from the Lord. The spoils of war were to be set aside for God, therefore for someone else to appropriate them was sacrilege. This brought a curse on the people. The silver and gold was holy to the Lord, and meant to be brought into His treasury. Everything else was to have been burnt with fire.

The punishment was very severe, affecting the whole camp, in order to impress on the nation the necessity of perfect obedience, the danger of evil beginnings, and the need for helping one another. Therefore sin was not just disobedience but violation of the divine covenant, sacrilege and robbery of God.

The first lesson we learn from this passage is about covetousness. Achan saw, then he coveted. Andrew Fuller wrote, "Covetousness will probably prove to be the cause of the eternal overthrow of more character among professing Christians than any other sin because it is almost the only crime which can be indulged in and the professor of religion be supported at the same time."

Achan professed to be a servant of God, a member of the commonwealth of Israel, a man of privilege. He was certainly not a poor man with a starving family. He was of the tribe of Judah which was to have the largest lot in the land of Canaan. But he could not wait for God's time.

Wanting things that do not belong to us leads to compromise in business, failure to be strictly honest, bills unpaid, living above means, robbing God of tithes, using God

given talents for own reputation rather than the glory of God, squandering time selfishly. No court of law can punish covetousness, for it is concerned only with overt actions, and not motive within the breast. Yet covetousness is the source of so many sins.

Secondly we learn the peril of disobedience. God said, “Destroy it”, and Achan said, “No, I will keep it.” This was downright and deliberate disobedience. Has God spoken to you through His Word or through conscience? Have you excused yourself, put it off, and thought you would decide for Christ some other time? Has God spoken to you about Christian service? Or someone you need to speak to? Or a friendship you need to make? Baptism, or attendance at the Lord’s Supper? If He has spoken and you are being disobedient – that will have a disastrous effect on your life.

Thirdly, this passage warns us against hypocrisy – pretending obedience when it is not there. It is easy to give the impression that all is well, and that we are walking obediently with God, saying the right things, being known as a good man, and a solid pillar of the work. Yet to harbour a secret sin, side by side with your profession. No one knows. No one would guess. It is hidden. But God knows and we know. Deceit is there, a lie being acted out.

Sin and its curse

We do not know whether it was a sudden gust of temptation that swept Achan before it, or weakness of character of long-standing growth. Either way, the consequences were disastrous. Sin was encouraged, played with, harboured, and it left its mark. Sin never leaves us untouched or unharmed. Sin, even secret sin, will find us out. Sin poisons us secretly from beneath. The song goes out of our life, it becomes increasingly evident that we are out of touch with God, we speak without conviction, our service is barren, our prayer lacks reality, and things just don’t ring true. Sin hinders our own life, or Christian service, and it affects others.

Achan’s sin affected his family, his tribe and his nation. None of us lives to himself and none of us sins or dies to himself. Sin affects our family circle, our Christian work, the Christian community, and ultimately the world. There is grief when youngsters do not make a profession or go on in the things of God – but what do they see or hear at home that would help them? No Christian grows cold and prayerless without affecting the church. None of us is lost in the crowd and can be forgotten.

The testimony of the church depends on the spiritual life of every member without exception. We either help it or we hinder it. One unrepentant sinner can undo much good. The sin of a fellow worker can affect all in that working community. The sin of a father or mother can affect the children. The sin of a fellow church member can affect the whole fellowship.

Sin and its cure

Sin and failure have to be confessed. Joshua was on his face before the Ark of the Covenant. He confessed defeat, weakness and shame. Grieved because of the shame that had come on the people of God, and the shame brought to the Lord’s name and cause. But God was not content with that. It is not enough to acknowledge the

symptoms. The cause must be sought out and put right. **Get thee ; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face. Israel hath sinned and they have transgressed my covenant** (Joshua 7:10,11) The Lord revealed the root cause – covetousness, disobedience and hypocrisy. **Up, sanctify the people** (Joshua 7:13). The story of the tribes is investigated. Judah is taken, then the family of the Zarahites. Then Zabdi, then Achan. The sin is discovered and punished.

How sin has to be dealt with ruthlessly and thoroughly. No use dealing with part but leaving a little. This only leaves a bridgehead for the devil to use again. It is costly to deal with sin. The second hand car salesman has to be honest about the cars he sells – even if it halves his income. It is costly to be honest. It is costly to be right with God. It costs jobs, engagement, prospects, family connections, inheritance, friendship of loved ones, favour of fellow Christians. But there is no escape and no substitute. The Lord warned, **Neither will I be with you any more except ye destroy the accursed from among you** (Joshua 7:12).

Achan was stoned and his body burnt. A heap of stones was piled up. The terrible punishment showed the seriousness of sin. We must either deal with sin or be cut off from vital contact with God, blessing and usefulness.

Sin is put away in the camp of Israel, and victory is regained, progress is resumed, and they move on to take full possession of the land. But the story of Achan stands to remind us of the seriousness of sin, how it robs, spoils and ruins lives.

Conclusion

Are you conscious of anything that needs to be put right? Yield to God. Let God have His way. And if sin is serious for the believer, it is even more serious for the unbeliever. Sin ruins, it leads to hell. **Be sure your sin will find you out** (Numbers 32:23). You will be found out by a blighted life this side of the grave, and found out above all at the judgement of God. The enormity will be seen in full and true colours in a lost eternity. **The wages of sin is death** (Romans 6:23). **How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation** (Hebrews 2:3). **Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him** (Luke 12:5). **The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all** (Isaiah 53:6). **Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us** (Galatians 3:13). **And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world** (1 John 2:2). **Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many** (Hebrews 9:28).

God delights in mercy. He longs to forgive, to bless and to restore. **Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon** (Isaiah 55:7).