

This morning I am in the fifth week of a sermon series I am doing on the Old Testament book of Joshua, the sixth book of the Bible. If you're unfamiliar with this book of the Bible, the historical context is that the Israelites, who were enslaved in Egypt, have been set free by God, using a man named Moses, with the plan of bringing them to the land of Canaan, a land which God had promised to their ancestor Abraham 600 years earlier. After the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years as a result of their disobedience, Joshua leads the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. Last week we looked at the battle of Jericho, where Israel defeats the first military establishment in Canaan, not through their own power but by God's intervention. This week, we will be in Joshua 7 & 8, and if you're going to understand what happens in this week's passage, you need to remember one important critical detail from last week, from 6:17-19, where God gives Joshua these instructions:

***Joshua 6:17-19*** - *The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. <sup>18</sup> But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. <sup>19</sup> All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."*

The phrase translated as "devoted things" is the Hebrew word "herem." Essentially, because of the wickedness of Jericho, the Israelites are instructed to kill all who live there, which as we saw last week is mainly the military and government officials, and to bring all the silver, gold, bronze and iron into the Lord's treasury. With that backdrop, we are going to read Joshua 7:

***Joshua 7:1*** - *But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.*

So right away, we are told that despite God's instructions, a man named Achan secretly took some of the items that were devoted to destruction. Continuing in v. 2-12:

<sup>2</sup> *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. <sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, <sup>5</sup> 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**. <sup>6</sup> Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. <sup>7</sup> 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!" <sup>8</sup> O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? <sup>9</sup> 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**?" <sup>10</sup> The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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.

So, what happens after the battle of Jericho is that the Israelites go to war against the military stronghold of Ai. Now, **imagine you're Israel – you just defeated Jericho with marching and trumpets!** You are definitely feeling confident. You're thinking, maybe if we dance a little jig and blow kazoos, we can take out Ai! Joshua sends out spies who check out Ai, and say that the battle shouldn't require more than only a few thousand fighting men. But instead of winning, the Israelites are routed, and verse 5 says that **"at this the hearts of the people melted and became like water."** They realize that God is not on their sides anymore, and if other cities find out that they could be defeated, they will be in serious trouble.

So, Joshua tears his clothes and falls down before the Lord, asking the Lord why he has allowed them to be defeated. And the Lord answers, saying, "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. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction." **Notice how God continually talks in "they" language, even though only one individual has sinned.** We will return to that. And then God lays out the plan of how they are to get back into a right relationship with Him:

<sup>13</sup> "Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it. <sup>14</sup> "'In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes shall come forward clan by clan; the clan that the LORD takes shall come forward family by family; and the family that the LORD takes shall come forward man by man. <sup>15</sup> He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel!'"

God tells Joshua to gather the whole nation together, and that somehow God will reveal who the offender is, and that this person and all that belongs to him must be destroyed by fire.

<sup>16</sup> Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken. <sup>17</sup> The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken. <sup>18</sup> Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. **This is what I have done:** <sup>21</sup> 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." <sup>22</sup> So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. <sup>23</sup> They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.

So the next morning Joshua has Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah is taken. Then the clans come forward, and the Zerahites are taken. Then the Zerahites come forward, and Zimri is taken. And when the family comes forward, Achan is taken. While this may sound like a dramatic approach, it certainly emphasizes the Doing it this way lets everyone see that they are somehow involved, and lets Achan see how his sinful decision has affected the whole nation of Israel.

<sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.*

In Joshua 8, Israel attacks Ai again and now that they have taken care of what is devoted to destruction, they are successful in defeating the city. We are not going to focus on that this morning, but instead on Joshua 7:

Two things from this passage:

### 1) There is no such thing as a private sin

By sin, I mean an action or choice that is contrary to God's will, not in line with what is good and right. So, the quick summary is this: Achan sins in the aftermath of the battle of Jericho by secretly taking that which was devoted to destruction. As a result, God withdraws His protection, Israel loses a battle, and 36 people die. And when it is revealed that Achan is to blame, he and his whole family are stoned and burned. And the people heap up a large pile of rocks over their dead bodies, which remains to this day. And they call the place "the Valley of Achor." **Achor is a word that means Trouble**, and so this place becomes known as The Valley of Trouble. Sounds like a Johnny Cash song. As we've already seen earlier in Joshua, there are many piles of rocks in the Old Testament that function as **memorials**. This particular memorial is a stark reminder how one **man's sins can bring trouble on other people and even on a whole community**.

As I read through the commentaries on this passage, some assume that Achan's family must have been complicit in Achan's deception, that they must have known he was hiding the devoted items in their tent, which is why they are put to death as well. This is possible, but the text is not clear on this. They may have been put to death simply because they belonged to Achan. If that is the case, I would imagine for some of you, this passage strikes you as incredibly **unfair**. Imagine if you were Achan's **10-year-old son**. One minute you're just outside, playing around with your cousins, having fun... the next minute you're being pelted with stones by your next-door neighbors because your dad stole some gold and a robe. Is that fair? **Is it fair for one person to die for the sins of another?** Is it fair that an innocent child dies for the sins of his father?

I think the main reason we might see this story as unfair is because we live in the most individualistic culture ever. We believe in the self-made man, where you can pick yourself up by your bootstraps and *make yourself into whatever you want, regardless of your background or family situation*. If you believe it, you can achieve it. If we don't like our family, we can move far away from them, and try to gather around us friends who we can treat like family. So why should one person be punished for the sins of another person? It's just not fair.

**Well, let me ask another question.** Is it fair that the children of an **alcoholic** should grow up living in fear and anxiety? Is it fair that a young woman should grow up unable to really experience or enjoy intimacy because she was a victim of **sexual abuse** as a little girl? Is it fair that that a 35-year-old mother of three should have to raise her kids alone because her husband **walked on out her** for another woman?

Is it fair that a husband and wife's marriage should suffer because of a **rebellious teenager**? Is it fair that a family should have trouble paying the bills because a mother can't control her **spending**? Is it fair that a family should suffer because of a father's inability to control his **anger**?

**Basically, is it fair that we should suffer because of the behavior, attitudes, issues, or decisions of another? Is it fair that those close to us should suffer because of our behavior, attitudes, issues, or decisions?**

No, it's not fair... but that's the truth of our human condition. We are all connected, and there is **no such thing as a private sin**. The story of Achan shows us plainly that each sin, each bad decision, every harmful action, no matter how secret, affects those closest to us, our community, and ultimately the people of God.

***For those of you who are married or who have been married,*** just think of all the baggage you bring into a relationship with a person you love, and how deeply you can hurt each other. ***And what about having kids?*** As a parent, the decisions I make, the issues I haven't dealt with, the addictions, the sins, the failures – they will affect not just me, not just my wife, but my kids as well. Someday they'll be in counseling trying to overcome all that I have done to them.

***What about being in any position of leadership?*** As a pastor, I am acutely aware how my issues, my struggles, my sinful choices affect those around me and those I

am responsible for. And any time you have influence over another human being, the same will be true for you.

**There is no such thing as a private sin.** As Achan found out, each sin, no matter how secret, affects those closest to us, and ultimately the people of God. Achan coveted and chose to take that which was devoted to destruction, even though they had been warned that doing so would lead to their own destruction. **Every time we choose to disobey God and take those things which are devoted to destruction, to go after those things which are contrary to His will and are not life-giving, we are not only impacting ourselves but those around us as well.** Even though there is personal responsibility for sin – Achan died for his sin – others will be affected by our sin, even if they don't deserve it.

The Bible talks about this reality in a couple of places:

*1 Corinthians 12:26-27 - If **one** part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it; if **one** part is honored, every part **rejoices** with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

And, most importantly, Adam's sin brought terrible consequences to the entire human race.

*Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned*

Because of Adam's sin, we have all fallen. His sin affected us all. There is no such thing as a private sin.

In Achan's story, his sin affected the whole community of Israel. Over and over God said "they sinned, they did what they should not have done." Even though 999,999 out of the million people in Israel did nothing wrong, they were all responsible for the sin of the one person, and the whole community suffered.

**Consider what that means in our current faith community, and just how foreign a concept that is to us. What if each of our individual sins really has that kind of effect on our whole church family?**

**What if your greed, or stinginess** - not tithing, not returning to the Lord what is his, buying more things instead of helping those in need – what if that negatively affects others in the church who are in need, or our ability to reach the world for Christ?

**What if your bitterness** – the grudges you hold against others, your reluctance to forgive or to work through conflict – harms the witness of the church and brings defeat?

**What if your lust** – your view of women or men as objects to possess instead of brothers and sisters to protect – brings defeat on the church, as it keeps the church from being a place of safety and beauty?

**What if your apathy towards justice** and love for your neighbor keeps this church from being a place that genuinely cares for the lost and hurting of the world?

**What if your complacency or self-centeredness** keeps us from having the teachers and assistants we need for our Sunday School, or the workers needed for what God has called this church to do?

**What if your unfriendliness** keeps someone from feeling welcome?

**What if my fear of conflict, my apathy, my distractibility, my poor communication, my self-centeredness,** is the thing holding God back from blessing this church in a greater way?

Again, there is no such thing as a private sin – all of our sins cause the body to suffer, and all of your sins cause me to suffer. I think this can cause you to ask one of two questions.

- **Why do I have to suffer for their sins?** Maybe you have been the victim of abuse, substance abuse, negligence, poor decisions, etc. Maybe you harbor bitterness towards others and God because of that. **This topic is more than just Bible Study – it's where you live – in the Valley of Trouble.** You feel like you're being stoned to death because of the sins of someone else. If that is you, **I'm sorry.** I'm sorry that you have been hurt over things that were not your fault, that you did not ask for. I am sorry, and there is hope.
- **Why do they have to suffer for my sins?** Or maybe you're in despair because you see the way your sins and failures are hurting the ones you love. Whenever you watch *movies or TV shows* where someone is being **tortured** – they can endure it themselves, but when someone they love is going to be hurt, they give up. It's easier to be hurt yourself than to see others hurt

because of you. Maybe you're in this camp - you see the way your decisions, your attitudes, your behaviors are causing the stones to hit the ones you love. Again, this is more than Bible Study – this is where you live, in the Valley of Trouble.

## **So where is the hope? Where is the hope when you are living in the Valley of Trouble?**

### **2) There is a door of hope in the valley of trouble**

The Valley of Achor shows up later in the Bible – in the Book of Hosea

In the book of Hosea, God tells his prophet, Hosea, to marry an unfaithful wife, as a parable of Israel's unfaithfulness to their God. She leaves him repeatedly for other men, but God commands Hosea to take her back, as a picture to Israel of how He will take them back, despite their spiritual unfaithfulness to Him. In chapter 2, God talks about how he will restore his relationship with Israel, his people, and in v.14-15 God says, *"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. <sup>15</sup> There I will give her back her vineyards, and will **make the Valley of Achor a door of hope**. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt."*

**Just meditate on that promise. God tells Hosea that He will make the Valley of Trouble a door of hope. The place where they have suffered for the sins of others, and where others have suffered for their sins, this very place will become the very entranceway to hope & life, and that they will sing as if they had just come out of captivity.**

How can God do that? How can God take a Valley of such trouble and despair and turn it into a Door of Hope? How can he take a place where one man's sin caused an entire family to be stoned and an entire people to lose a battle, and turn it into a place where Hope begins? How can he take your troubles, the ways you have suffered for the sins of others, or the ways others have suffered because of your sins, and make that very place the entranceway to hope? Is this just positive thinking, or is there something more upon which to rest that hope?

Well, a couple of thousand years after Achan, there was another man who went through his own Valley of Trouble. Jesus, in **John 12**, is preparing for His death. In v. 27, he says **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour."** If



there was ever anyone who did not deserve to suffer, but did for the sins of others, it was Jesus. Jesus was troubled, even though he had no sin, by my sins, and by your sins. He was troubled by the sins of those who crucified him. He was troubled by the sins of his apostles, who betrayed and deserted him. Ultimately, he was troubled by the sins of the whole world. God troubled Jesus with our sins so that we might be saved from it, so that our **Valley of Trouble might become a Door of Hope**. The worst evil in the history of the world, the perfect God in the flesh being executed for sins he did not commit, became the Door of Hope for all who embrace it. Through the cross, Jesus turns the valley of trouble into a door of hope. Our sins become the doorway to salvation. It's for that reason he can say in John 14:27, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Because of Jesus, there is a **Door of Hope in the Valley of Trouble**.

We read earlier how we are all fallen because of Adam's sin. But the flip side of Adam's sin is that through Jesus' righteousness, we can be made righteous.

***Romans 5:19** - For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

For all who cry out, how can it be fair for an innocent person to suffer for the sins of another, the counter is given here: **how can it be fair for a guilty person to benefit from the righteousness of another?** The good news is that Jesus, the sinless one, took the punishment our sins deserved, and has given us His perfect record, making us acceptable to God. At the cross, the valley of trouble has become the door of hope. The unjust death of the innocent Son of God has opened a door for sinners like you and me to enter eternal life.

Because of the cross, there is a **Door of Hope in the Valley of Trouble**. Only Jesus can enter a situation where others are suffering for your sins, and make it a doorway to hope. Only Jesus can enter the valley where you feel like you are being stoned to death because of the sins of another, and turn that place into an entrance to hope. As Paul says:

***Romans 8:28** - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

This morning, many of you are living in the Valley of Trouble. You ended up there because of the sin, the abuse, the failure of another. You can't see hope, and you can't see past the mountains that are around you. I want you to know that because

of the cross, there is a **Door of Hope in the Valley of Trouble**. And some of you have brought others into the Valley of Trouble. You see others being stoned because of your failures, because of your decisions, and it breaks your heart. I'm here to tell you that because of the cross, there is a **Door of Hope in the Valley of Trouble**. Walk through that door of salvation and forgiveness this morning. Let go of that which is devoted to destruction, and walk trusting in the Lord.