



**Joshua 7**  
**The Sin of Achan**  
**July 25, 2021**

We are going to Joshua 7 today.

As long as I've been a Christian, the emphasis in the Christian circles I have been in has been on bringing individuals to a personal relationship with Jesus. And rightly so. Apart from Christ we are sinful and facing God's wrath, but as an individual turns from sin and unbelief and turns to embrace Jesus, their sins are forgiven and they are guaranteed eternity with God. So it would be hard to come up with anything more important than leading people to that knowledge of Jesus.

And throughout the scriptures you see that kind of emphasis on the individual: Jesus tells the story of a good shepherd that leaves 99 sheep to pursue the one wandering sheep. People are said to each be made in the image of God, giving each person dignity and making them worthy of respect. Individual people are saved from their sin, people don't go to heaven because they are part of a group.

The Bible takes nothing away from that individualism, but it adds to it. In addition to this emphasis on creating redeemed people, there is a strong biblical emphasis on creating a redeemed people. A redeemed community. A community of faith.

God is not only creating new people, but a new people. He wants individuals to know him and live holy lives, but it is impossible to live holy lives disconnected from the redeemed community.

Revelation 1:5-6 capture this dynamic well:

**Revelation 1:5b-6 "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen"**

He has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests. When we become Christians, we are connected to something bigger than ourselves. We are plunged into the active life of the Christian community.

During the pandemic we encouraged people to watch the sermons online, and thank God for the technology that allowed that, even ten years ago we couldn't have done that. But that was a temporary measure. Online church is really not church - it was a bandaid for a crisis, but not what we were made for. The church-free Christianity of our day is totally foreign to scripture.

God has always connected people in redeemed community. In the Old Testament where we're studying they were connected in the nation of Israel, in our day we are connected in the church.

And God's design is not only that we as individuals bear witness to Christ in the world around us, but that we stand in solidarity with one another. And that we would be unique as individuals, living very differently than those around us, but also a unique community that stands out as very different from all other human communities.

When Jesus says, "You are the light of the world," He uses the plural form of the word you. "Y'all" You all are the light of the world, you all, together are a city on a hill. The redeemed community stands out like a lit up city on a hill on a dark night. We see it again in:

**1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."**

You (plural) are a chosen race, a nation, a people. And that people exists to proclaim the excellencies of God.

There's a corporate witness to the world, such that the way we connect to one another says, "This is what the kingdom of Jesus is like."

By the way, when we talk about a corporate gathering or corporate witness of the church, we don't mean that we want the characteristics of a corporation. We aren't saying "we do

things like they do at the big company you work for, we want things to be all corporate” and that the pastor should be Lord Business from the Lego Movie.

The latin word corpus means “body.” So corporate church is not church that has lots of swag and operates like a fortune 500 company, we just mean it’s a body - we are together - we are formed into a whole.

We, individually, represent Christ on earth as his ambassadors. And we have a corporate testimony, a combined testimony to the world.

And that brings with it an inescapable responsibility to be a vital part of the community of faith (which certainly means showing up and not just watching online), but it requires far more than that.

It also means we are called to live holy lives, not only because sin is displeasing to God when individuals commit it (which is the biggest problem with sin), but also because sin committed by Christians dims the collective light of the city on the hill that His redeemed people are to be. My sin displeases God and lets down the body of Christ.

Now in our study we are in the Old Testament. And as you read through the Old Testament, it’s important to remember their faith community was different from ours. It was, in part, a geographic kingdom with borders and the physical nation of Israel. (We don’t have a nation like that today - we don’t have a city or a country that is the one for all Christians like Israel basically was.) It’s also important to realize that that community existed before the time of the cross of Jesus, and the world was very different then.

But God had called them to be a unique and holy nation. All of the nations of the world were engaged in conquest - all of the tribes and people groups were fighting for survival, fighting for land. And it was a dog-eat-dog world of constant warfare, taking land, trying to wipe out peoples, looting cities. The city of Jericho that we looked at last week had exchanged hands perhaps dozens of times in warfare.

And now God was sending His community under the leadership of Joshua into the promised land. But he had called them to be very different even in how they conquered.

We saw last week, for example, that God told them to offer peace to the cities in the land and not go to war unnecessarily. And in Joshua 6, God told them that when they took the city of Jericho, they weren’t to go in as pirates and marauders, but instead he told them:

**Joshua 6:18-19** “But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. 19 But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”

It was necessary for these people to be used as God’s instrument of judgment on Jericho, but they still were supposed to be very different from the nations around them in how they carried that out.

So we saw last week that the walls came tumbling down and Jericho was conquered. Jericho, that mighty city, had fallen because of God’s power. It was a miraculous victory that God gave His people.

But someone among the nation of Israel had a secret. Secret sins never stay secret. Augustine said “*he that becomes protector of sin shall surely become its prisoner.*” Scripture says, “Be sure, your sin will find you out.” And that’s how chapter 7 opens:

**Joshua 7:1** But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.

So this guy named Achan didn’t follow the command not to touch the wealth of the city. He broke faith, he secretly took some of the wealth for himself (acting like a pirate and not as part of a light to the nations.)

He was selfish, he wasn’t concerned for the collective holiness of the church or for their uniqueness in the world. He didn’t care that if one part of the body disobeyed God then the body as a whole disobeyed God. He didn’t care about the solidarity that God had called them to. He didn’t stand in solidarity with Israel.

And at this point, God is angry at their sin, but nobody knows it. Achan thinks he got away with it.

And now it’s on to the next battle for the nation of Israel:

**Joshua 7:2 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” And the men went up and spied out Ai. 3 And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.”**

So Israel just took out the big city in Jericho. And now they have to sweep up a little bit and take out this little podunk town called Ai.

This should be easy. They just took the big, strong, walled, fortified city. Ai should be no problem. It's like they already beat NYC, now they have to take out Avon. This should be a piece of cake. Send in a few soldiers, occupy the Tom Wahls and the Tops and you've conquered the place.

**Joshua 7:4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, 5 and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.**

So they get beat by Avon. Which is, of course, shocking. This should have been easy because Ai was small, but also because God was on their side. God told them to take the land - and God had clearly been fighting for them. The walls collapsed at the sound of trumpets in Jericho. But now Israel loses to this tiny town.

And their hearts melt with fear - which is how the hearts of the people of Jericho were described earlier in this book. Now God's people are described this way.

Now remember, nobody knows why this happened yet. Not even Joshua, Achan's sin is still a secret at this point. So Joshua, as the leader, is totally shattered and confused:

**Joshua 7:6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. 7 And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?”**

So Joshua is mourning - tearing his clothes and putting dust on his head. And he is pouring out his grief to God. And he prays a prayer that makes it sound like his faith is even wavering. In verse 7 he almost repeats the words of the faithless Israelites that they spoke when they were in the wilderness.

Israel had been led out of Egypt by Moses, they were getting hungry in the wilderness, and it says in Exodus 16 they said, **“Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”**

They got out of Egypt but encountered hard times and wailed that they wanted to go back. Joshua is leading the people and loses his men in the battle against Ai and wants to go back. He’s grieving at this loss, most of all because the glory of God is at stake.

The name of God is going to be besmirched because of the failure of the community.

Because it seems that God has let them down.

And what God is doing here makes no sense. God said He was giving them the land, but Ai defeats them.

It’s interesting that as the readers we can see what’s happening in this situation when God doesn’t make sense. There’s more to the story, and if Joshua knew what we know then God’s ways would make sense to him. When you know the whole story, God’s ways look good and right. But when you’re a character in the story and you don’t know the whole story, God can be perplexing and frustrating and at times even look like He’s not good.

And it’s important to remember that in our lives, we are characters in the story who don’t know all that is going on or all that God is up to. So we live by faith that He knows the whole story (he writes the whole story even,) and when his ways look dark or confusing or even unjust, when the whole story is told and all of the secrets are revealed we will only praise Him for His perfections for all eternity.

We’re living in a day when arrogant men and women make accusations against God - that God is unjust, God’s ways of governing the universe are wrong. But behind all of those accusations is the arrogant assumption that I know the whole story. That I’m

omniscient, I know all things, and if I don't know the reason for what God allows, or if I can't fathom the reason, there must not be a reason.

But God is God, God knows all things, God does all things well.

And we can certainly, like Joshua here, pour out our grief to Him and tell Him our frustrations and how confused we are by His ways. But keep in mind that we are talking to the one who knows the whole story.

So Joshua is praying. He is deeply grieving the failure of the community. They lost 36 guys, and he is feeling the weight of the defeat of the whole community. He didn't commit the sin, but as the leader of Israel he is feeling the effects of their sin. He is experiencing the loss and the judgment on behalf of the people.

**Joshua 7:10 The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up!<sup>1</sup> Why have you fallen on your face? 11 Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.**

So God tells Joshua what's up. And notice that God doesn't say at first, "Achan has sinned." He says, "Israel has sinned." The nation has sinned. But it was just one guy. Everybody else did what they were supposed to do, but one guy's sin means the nation sinned.

Which makes sense if they are a body. I can't just walk up to someone on the street and punch them and say, "It wasn't me, it was my hand." No, that's *me*. What my hand does is what I do.

And being part of a body, a community, means that what I do we all do. My sins are our sins, my triumphs are our triumphs. When the New Testament describes this body of Christ it says:

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<sup>1</sup> Reminiscent of lots of calls for wakefulness / alertness in Scripture - both in remembrance of God's law / against laziness / to be watchful against sin.

1 Peter 1: 13  
1 Peter 4:7  
1 Peter 5:8  
1 Corinthians 16:13  
Matthew 24:42, 61

**1 Corinthians 12:26 “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”**

There is a sense in which what one person does, the church does.

How much would it shape our behavior if we believed this? If I had a sense that what I say and do represents the body of Christ? It represents the church as a whole?

I saw a thread on Facebook this week, where two Christians from our church were lighting each other up. (It wasn't a discussion of facts, but a nasty exchange.) And it's like we have come to believe that social media is this zone where the commands of Jesus don't apply. Matthew 18 says that if your brother sins against you, you go and tell him his faults, just between the two of you.

We put an asterisk on that and say, “Except on social media. There we can publicly destroy our brothers and sisters without any concern for a process Jesus laid out.”

And I read it thinking, “These two have no concern at all for the corporate witness of the body of Christ.” There's no effort at following the commands of Jesus, no effort at pursuing holiness, personal or corporate. Only a desire to be right.

Public discussion and disagreement on issues is fine, and maybe social media is a good place for that. But public accusation of sin and name-calling and mean-spirited attacks is totally prohibited by scripture (public accusation is supposed to be the last step in a process.) But somehow we've come to accept the ways of cancel culture, and the light of our corporate witness is dimmed.

But whether our sins are on full display on social media, or they're hidden under our tents, my sins are my community's sins. And it weakens the whole community:

**Joshua 7:12 Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. 13 Get up! Consecrate the people and say, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the LORD, God of Israel, “There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.” 14 In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribe that the LORD takes by lot shall come near by clans.**

**And the clan that the LORD takes shall come near by households. And the household that the LORD takes shall come near man by man. 15 And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel.”**

God says to Joshua, you lost the battle because Israel stands under judgment for their rebellion to me. And I will no longer be with you unless this is made right. And the way it is made right is for that person and all that he or she has to be destroyed.

And God decides now is the time to expose the culprit. Which God always eventually does.

Jesus said in **Matthew 10:26**, **“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”**

**Number 32:32** **“be sure your sin will find you out.”**

**Galatians 5:7** **“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”**

Eventually they realize the culprit was Achan...

**Joshua 7:16** **So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. 17 And he brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. 18 And he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. 19 Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” 20 And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: 21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”**

So Joshua goes through the people and narrows it down until he gets to Achan. God did the revealing here, they cast lots (like drawing straws), and God used it to reveal Achan.

And Achan confesses.

Achan knew what he was doing. God's command was clear: don't touch the devoted things. But he saw them, which means more than he noticed them but that he beheld them. He was in awe of the wealth he saw. He was seriously thinking about the riches that he saw.

Then he coveted them. He thought that the reasons for taking them outweighed the reasons for not.

The glory of God in the world was outweighed by the vanity that the cloak offered, the security and the options the money offered, the status that the gold offered.

What he wanted was more important than the corporate witness of the people of God. The glory of God in the world didn't matter as much as these other things.

So he took. He saw, coveted, and took.<sup>2</sup>

He coveted and he stole, breaking two commandments. And the consequence for his action was that the whole nation was guilty.

**Joshua 7: 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. 23 And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD. 24 And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. 25 And Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. 26 And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.**

So Achan gets the death penalty.

And they name that place the Valley of Achor, which means the Valley of trouble.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller's sermon on Joshua 7 unpacks this process in his heart.

And then, with justice done and judgment carried out, they go on in chapter 8 to take Ai.

The one man's sin was the whole community's sin, and that man's punishment was credited to the whole community as well. And, freed from that sin, now keeping God's covenant again, they go on to claim the promises.

There are a number of important applications for us.

- 1) Don't minimize sin. Even what we think are small, manageable, secret sins displease God and affect the whole community.
- 2) Don't ever believe that my sin only affects me. No man is an island.
- 3) We eventually reap what we sow. There will be consequences for our hidden sin, so confess to God and to one another like that matters.

But in this dark story there is also good news.

Once Achan was stoned and the sin was dealt with, they did go on to win battles. They were renewed and re-oriented on God's covenant.

Later on in scripture this Valley of Achor is mentioned.

It's mentioned in the book of Hosea. And in that book, Hosea marries a harlot who continues in her harlotry after their marriage and deserts him. And that horrible marriage and horrible sin is all set up to represent the way Israel was treating God - turning from him, finding their pleasure in sin and false gods.

**Hosea 2:13-15 "And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD.**

**14 "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.**

**15 And there I will give her her vineyards  
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.  
And there she shall answer gas in the days of her youth,  
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.**

**16 “And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer  
will you call me ‘My Baal.’**

Baal is the name of a false god that can be translated husband. All of our sins and false gods are like false husbands, false lovers.

But God says he will take those who have sinned, who have run after other gods, and he will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

This place of trouble would become the doorway to restoration.

Achan had to be troubled, put to death, for sin so the people could be restored. The nation had to go to that valley of trouble to enter the door of hope.

And as dark as that story is, it can point us to the good news of Jesus.

In the story of Achan, one man’s sin was credited to the whole community. And that man’s death was also credited to the whole community.

Listen to how Romans 5 sums up the Gospel:

**Romans 5:18-19 “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for fall men. 19 For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.**

The story of humanity is the story of Adam sinning, and because he sinned as our representative in the garden, we all sinned in Adam. And the consequences have been great - we’ve all been sinners by nature and by choice, and it has wrecked us and brought God’s judgment.

But there's another man. A true and better Achan, who never sinned Himself. Nonetheless he took the sin and trouble of all who would believe on Himself.

And He went to the valley of Achor for us.

God came to us in Christ and took on Himself the sins of the community. He died on the cross, and that valley of trouble became a door of hope to all who would believe.

Because if we will confess our sin, we'll turn to Him admitting that we are the ones with the stolen goods under our tent, we'll drop our pride and hold nothing back, exposed by His spirit as the guilty ones, and if we'll believe in Christ and his work of redemption for us on that cross, then we will be forgiven.

Because Jesus stepped in to take the stoning and the fire that we deserved as He faced God's just anger. He took the penalty in full, even though He was the only innocent one. And if we'll turn to him in repentance and faith and trust in His work, then we'll see that that valley of trouble was a door of hope.

The agony of the cross, the sacrifice of the Son of God, the darkest story and the worst sin ever committed, opens up to us a door of hope.

*Sermon by Kevin Maloney with contributions from Cody Wilbanks and Abbey Sitterley.*

*Prayer of confession at the end of this sermon was adapted from a prayer called "Covenant Faithfulness" on page 56-57 of the prayer book entitled Prone to Wander by Barbara and Wayne Duguid.*

### **Questions for Small Group Discussion:**

1. What are some of the ways in-person church gatherings benefit us in comparison to virtual versions of community?
2. Has there been a season or circumstance in your life where you didn't understand what God is doing, but now, in hindsight, see His purpose?
3. What does the story of Achan teach us about the gravity of sin?
4. What does the gravity of sin teach us about God's grace and love shown on the cross?