

We are on a journey together making our way from here to there. Like the people of Israel, we want to escape the wasteland of the wilderness and enter the Promised Land, the place where we can get busy fulfilling our God-given purpose of making God famous. Today we will discover that the Canaanites and the Amorites were not the only adversaries of God's people. There were some internal enemies that accompanied them into the promised land to sabotage their God-given purpose.

Some of our most painful hinge moments are caused by the influence of three powerful forces Appetite, Ambition and Approval. These temptations (life drifts) have been around since Adam and Eve. Jesus confronted them when He was tempted in the wilderness. We cannot escape these temptations but we can escape being ruled by them. Joshua 7 is a warning about the danger of our appetite.

When the children of Israel entered the promised land, the response of the Canaanites was one of fear and resignation. 5:1 says, "their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel." Jericho was destroyed by the Israelites. After rescuing Rahab and her family, "they burned the city with fire, and all that was in it." 6:24. I don't want to go back and re-preach last week's sermon but I do want to make one thing clear. Israel was a theocracy. That means they were directly ruled by God and the destruction of these wicked nations was carried out under God's direct command. We may not fully understand God's methods, they may even seem unloving or unfair, but my job is not to defend God. I would rather God defend me. These commands were given to a unique people at a unique time. Israel was an instrument of judgment in the hands of God. We are not. We are the church, not Israel. We are not commanded to punish people for their godless ways. But we are commanded to warn people of God's judgment. Because of His great love, God wants to save us. But because of His holiness and justice, He must punish evil and wickedness. And no one is immune.

The standards God applied to the Canaanites are no different from the standards applied to His own people. God is no respecter of persons. There is one standard for all people. When we violate God's standard there will be consequences. The good news is that there is way out of future destruction. Let's start at 7:1

This verse reminds us of **the danger of desire**. Desire is a good thing. We desire food when we are hungry and we desire water when we are thirsty. There are many God-given desires like the desire for intimacy and security that enrich our lives. But when we attempt to satisfy these desires illegitimately, the painful consequences of our actions can spread like a deadly cancer.

Cancer is a normal process out of control. The cells in our bodies were designed to reproduce themselves. Cancer cells, however, ignore or lose the normal requirements of reproduction and replicate constantly. When they grow out of control into a giant ball of cells, we call that a tumor. When they spread or metastasize through the body, we call that death. Desire works in a similar way.

Achan described how he surrendered to his appetite in 7:19-21. This brief description provides us with the anatomy of sin. He saw. He coveted. He took. Eve followed this same deadly path in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:6). So did David with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2-4). Achan's sin followed a well-worn path.

1. **He saw** something shiny. Notice how he subtly redefines sin in v. 21. He refers to "the spoil." But these weren't spoils. They had been declared off limits (6:18). Never underestimate the creativity of the human heart to make excuses for our sin. Sexual sins can be grouped into a harmless category called "alternative lifestyles." And if you are a habitual offender, you will be called a "sex addict." That's because addiction is a disease not a sin. Drunkenness is a disease. Even teenage rebellion is a disease. It is now called ODD, Oppositional Defiance Disorder. There is even a new diagnosis for children who lash out at teachers or students called intermittent explosive disorder (IED). Your teenager can't help it if they have a disease. In fact, let's call as many sins as possible "diseases" so that we will not be held accountable for them. I can't be blamed for having a disease. There are even financial benefits to redefining sin. Insurance companies will cover a disease. They don't cover sin.

I know some of you are pushing back right now because there are biological factors to some of these behaviors. But before you email me, consider this, where there is no sin, there is no forgiveness. I must live with the condition and its consequences until I die. And die I will because "the wages of sin is death." Once Achan saw...

2. **He coveted** and took the items. Desires become sinful when they are combined with coveting. "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." James 1:13-15. Our normal response to sin is to hide it.

3. **He concealed** his sin...v. 21b. The irony is that if he had waited a couple of days he could have taken anything he wanted from the next city, Ai.

The wages of sin is death. Achan's disobedience resulted in some painful unintended consequences. The first one is obvious in the text...7:2-5a.

When sin goes unaddressed, people die. This was Israel's only defeat in the seven-year Conquest of Canaan and 36 soldiers died. So did Achan...7:24-26. This seems so harsh but these were the people called of God to be His witness to the world and through whom God would bring a Savior. Joshua was required to deal with this Achan's behavior in a way that would strike fear into the hearts of the people and make them realize just how serious sin was. Timing is everything and in this initial period of occupying the promised land God resorted to severe measures to protect His plan and purpose. You may recall that in the NT, as the early church is born, Ananias and Sapphira were put to death for lying to the Holy Spirit in order to strike the fear of God into the hearts of the people. I'm glad God doesn't feel required to operate this way but I am also reminded that my sin is just as serious and just as deserving of judgment. Death wasn't the only consequence of sin.

When sin goes unaddressed, people lose heart. 7:5b. That last sentence indicates that the tables have been turned on Israel. Previously it was the Canaanites and Amorites whose hearts melted before the army of Israel. Now Israel was on the run. Israel's great victory was followed by a surprising defeat. The people were suddenly filled with crippling doubt wondering if God's help had been withdrawn. They didn't know why. Had God changed His mind?

Achan wasn't the only one to blame for this terrible defeat. There are a couple of things missing in this story. Nowhere in this passage does it even hint that Joshua and the people of Israel consecrated themselves before dealing with Ai. They presumed upon the goodness of God and became overconfident. Furthermore, it doesn't appear they took the Ark of the Covenant into the battle. The Ark symbolized the presence and power of God. They went into the battle in their own strength and they failed! They didn't even pray about the matter. One victory never ensures the next. The basis of any success is always the Lord Himself and our dependence on Him.

This episode is a good reminder that if we try to live the Christian life by fighting the flesh in our own strength we will fail time after time. But if we keep in step with the Spirit of God and rely on Him, we can be confident God will fight on our behalf. When David faced Goliath he said, "that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand." 1 Sam. 17:47.)

When sin goes unaddressed, we look for someone to blame. 7:7-9. Joshua questions the goodness of God. Another word for this is blame. In our sinful human nature, we look in every direction for a reason for defeat, except ourselves. We blame, make excuses, hide, but we often fail to honestly examine our own lives. We assume the problem could not possibly be us. So what do we do when we suffer the consequences of our sin? What if we are suffering but we're not sure if it's our fault, someone else's fault or just living in a fallen world? There's a remedy.

The remedy for sin. The fact is, we all have Achan hearts. It's not just Canaanites who sin. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The difference is how we deal with sin. When we sin and then try to cover it up, we bring pain and trouble into our lives. But God has a prescription for an Achan heart.

Confess. God's rebuke is recorded in 7:10-13. These are strong words but Joshua is encouraged to confess. The same opportunity is offered to Achan...7:19.

Obey...8:1-3, 18, 25-27. The word of God is given to help us recover when we are blown off course. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." 2 Tim. 3:16-17. Never forget that reversals are reversible.

Recommit yourself to God's purpose. 8:30-35. Achan stopped believing that God's way was best and most rewarding, and so his appetite for gold and silver became stronger than his appetite for God. This attitude so dishonored God that he refused to fight for Israel until they acknowledged their sin. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, then what must be the greatest sin? To love something more than God.

Notice that the altar Joshua erected was on Mt. Ebal, the place of the curse. "It shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal." Dt. 11:29. I want you to notice a few things about this altar.

First, it was to be constructed with uncut stones. In other words, this was not to be a work of art to be adored and admired by men. They were to use the stones God put there. Secondly the altar was to be used for the sacrificial offerings - burnt

offerings and peace offerings. Etched on those stones was the OT Law affirming that the Law of the Lord was the law of the land. Next we're told that the people stood with the ark of God in between them. They had reestablished the presence of God in the very center of their experience where He should always be. Notice in v. 35 that "the strangers living among them" were invited to participate in this worship service. There is one God, one Law and one people of God.

All these actions prophetically point forward to a time when Jesus would offer Himself up as a sacrifice. His death would set us free from the curse of the Law. What is the curse of the Law? The perfect requirements of God that we could never satisfy. But why was the altar on Mt. Ebal, the place of cursing and not on Mt. Gerizim, the place of blessing? The New Testament gives us the answer:

"For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.' Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.' However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them.' Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Gal. 3:10-14

This story is not just about an ancient people in a distant land. **This is us.** This is our story. I don't know about your Life Grid but mine is marked by peaks and valleys, victories and defeats. Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay and cost you more than you could ever pay. So Jesus paid the penalty for your sin so that you could live. "The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."