

Joshua 7-8 Achan's Sin

Now, it's coming up to the end of August and September is nearly here – which means new school year is nearly here! And in order to introduce the big idea from our Bible passage this morning, I want you to begin by imagining a school classroom in the first week. And I want you to imagine that the teacher is actually a parent of one of the children in their class.

I don't know if any of you have ever been teachers, and taught your kids? Or whether your own parents were teachers? But it's quite an interesting situation and one which I think many people have wondered about – what does it look like to be fair? And how does the teacher ensure that they will be fair? So, we imagine that in this lesson one of the pupils is very naughty and talks out of turn; after being warned, they continue to do it over and over again and so the teacher rightly and fairly punishes them. They get the maximum punishment and they are made something-of an example. That's fine. But it's what happens next that makes it really interesting. Next, their own child proceeds to follow this bad example. They do exactly the same thing – talking out of turn being warned continuing to do it over and over again. I wonder what you think the teacher would do? Do you think they might be inclined to be too lenient? I mean if they really love the child, and they always want best for them, perhaps they won't dish out the punishment which if we're honest is actually deserved. But perhaps you feel like there is the opposite danger? Perhaps they will punish their own child too strongly, in a bid not to be seen as showing favouritism. Or perhaps they know their own child better, and expect better from? Or they can read their body language better and they are more irritated by the poor behaviour? There are all sorts of possibilities, and I think you realise it's quite interesting moment, and it's a real test for the teacher.

Well actually that's a pretty close parallel to the situation God finds himself in in Joshua chapter 7. If you were here last week you will remember that God *himself* brought his people victory in a fight in Jericho. And he did that as a judgement (as a punishment) on the Canaanites for their sin. Well in this chapter, we see his own people (his own child – we might draw a parallel) committing a sin for which they need to be judged – and the fairness of God is going to be revealed – does he have favourites and does he treat people unfairly. And of course, we're going to see that God is *not* too lenient, or unfair, is not overly harsh, he doesn't know any one person more than any other – he sees and knows everything and everyone completely.

So the first lesson from passages this

1) God is fair – he has no favourites

Last week, Ray who preached for us, explained that the Canaanites in Jericho were not randomly destroyed by God's people, but God himself was bringing judgement upon them for their sin. If you want to try and get your head around that any more – do listen to that on our website, or come and speak to me!

So I want to start explaining what the sin is today, what did God's own people actually do wrong? And the headline was there for us right at the start, in v1 of our chapter. Do you spot it? "the Israelites were *unfaithful* in regard to the devoted things" the issue is not just about the practicalities of law keeping, but to do with attitude of the heart – they do not trust and follow God and his ways, they unfaithful to him.

And if you flick back and look at the previous chapter

Joshua 6v17 God said: "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.¹⁸ *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.¹⁹ All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury."

Not only with the people absolutely aware of this, but Joshua repeated it to them on the seventh day just before they sounded the trumpets. Achan knew exactly what he was doing. So what did he actually do? What actually took place? I used-to imagine Achan as a warrior who was doing his job, and just happened to stumble across somebody's treasure store. In one of the little back alleys of Jericho he discovers a precious robe and some gold and silver – and in a moment of weakness he shoves it into his rucksack and carries on like normal. But that isn't quite what happened. In his confession v21 he explains. After the battle, when the heat is gone, he *visits the plunder*. Who knows why he was there? Perhaps he deliberately went to go and see it, perhaps he was already longing to take some of it for himself and his family? Perhaps he worked there and was supposed to be guarding it? Anyway he sees this robe, and he sees some gold and silver which he thinks he will be able to snatch secretly. He works out a way to take it without anyone knowing, and he snatches it and brings it home. What a sneaky hero he feels, when he brings it into the tent and shows his family. They all get to touch it and admire it, perhaps they are all dreaming of what they can buy with. And they decide to bury it in the ground inside their tent, so that no one else can find out. Now, we know for sure that no *one else* knew about this. God had been clear in his warning, and yet the fighters go ahead and attack Ai just as they would.

In v3 when the spies say they can win a victory with just a reduced army, they are absolutely right (we have no reason to doubt this) and if God were not fighting against them, they *would* have won a victory. No one else knew. No one dubs him in... Joshua explained how God would expose the sin, and Achan doesn't come forward himself to confess, and no one comes to Joshua to have a quiet word. No one knew! We also know for sure that his family were involved! I think this is something which people find puzzling in this passage, and perhaps you found it puzzling. Achan isn't the only one punished, but his whole family is. How is that fair? They were all involved. God, who is a fair judge, sticks to his own law. And God himself, and Joshua the leader know Deuteronomy 24v16, which says this: "Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin." God says it is not fair to put someone to death for someone else's sin, so we can be sure that the family knew, they were in cahoots! God is fair. That's the big lesson here, that God is fair and he has no favourites. He doesn't punish the nations but let his people off – just because he likes them best...

Like the teacher with their own child in the class – God here is confronted with sin within his own people. And he *does* punish it just like he punished sin in the Canaanites? He is fair and just. It's no good saying "well I'll be ok because I'm one of God's people" that's what people said in the Old Testament at some points "I'm descended from Abraham" but God will judge his own people just like the nations – he's fair. So don't think of God as treating people differently, meting out punishment here but not there... God is completely fair, and that means when his own people sin, they set themselves against him just like anyone else, and there needs to be punishment.

Of course that's a good thing, because God is fair, he won't treat your friend better or worse, he won't treat that nation more harshly! Nothing like that, he's fair. But it again reminds us sin is a problem.

And that brings us to the second lesson of this passage, which isn't simply how serious sin is, and that it will be punished – we saw that last week to some extent. The lesson is this:

2) Sin is never secret.

This lesson shouldn't really be a surprise to us, after all Jesus said "my father sees what is done in secret", and we know that the Lord knows our thoughts even before they turn into words or actions, and we know the Lord looks on the heart. And yet, we get a pretty dramatic reminder of it! Imagine the tension on that morning v16 - Joshua is casting lots, and the Lord is supernaturally and miraculously choosing which ones will come out – and therefore who is going to end up walking forward.

Imagine Achan and how he must be feeling. "No-one saw me, I did such a good job. No one in the family will say anything, they can't have told anyone, we talked about it and they wouldn't be that stupid. I just need to keep my head down, keep quiet, and not look shifty. I mean there are thousands of us here, what are the chances of me being picked out anyway? The whole thing will just blow over and I'll end up really wealthy!! Just gotta stay really calm" - Then Judah is called forward, and he and his whole tribe walk forward... "ah rats, but I suppose it had to be someone – look, everyone around me is feeling nervous too" Then the Zerahites, then Zimri, and then there's like 15 of them standing there, and Achan finally starts to think "this is actually going to happen! They know? How can it be?" Then Achan himself is chosen, and the blood rushes to his head, and his heart is pounding, and Joshua says "give glory to God, what have you done?" And with his tongue dry and sticking in his mouth, terrified, Achan admits it.

He is exposed and found out in front of people **before** he gets down on his knees and pleads for God's forgiveness, and it's too late. He had all night – Joshua told people what was going to happen, and he could have come to Joshua and to God(!) in repentance and faith – but he took his chances with the lots. Achan found out the hard way, sin is *never* secret – God saw!

And countless people make exactly the same mistake today. Both Christians and non-Christians make a habit of hiding things and trying to forget about them – we say "sweep it under the carpet", we could say "hide it in a hole". I wonder if any of us, right now, has a secret sin that we are hiding? A sin that has a cherished place in our heart?

Sin is never secret!

I'm talking about big things: gambling, alcoholism, pornography (so often people think that secret). Addicts *can* be so good at hiding their problems (sometimes), from other *people*. Some aren't good, but think they are. These things *destroy* lives! But even if you do hide it, it forces you to live your life in your own secret world of lies. But sin is never secret! God knows. It will be exposed! One day! I'm also talking about small things: illegal music downloads, slightly exaggerated expense claims, nursing and cherishing a bitterness towards that colleague or that family member - you chew on resentment against them over and over, but no one needs to know? What is it for you? Is there something? Is God making you aware of it now? Sin is never secret! It could be sin from the past – something so long ago, you almost don't remember it yourself, it's gone and forgotten about – or it could be/should be forgotten about, shouldn't it? Sin is never secret. You need to sort it out. It could be - the way you're treating one other person, meanness and bullying! *They* know – but they're too afraid to say anything, and you keep it quiet... Sin is never secret.

God wants a *really* holy people – he doesn't want a people who **look** really holy, he wants a people who **are** really holy. It's not good enough to clean up the look, (to clean up the outside)!

So what *should* we do? We shouldn't follow the example of Achan, who just kept quiet and thought he would get away with it. If you're a Christian, you know you shouldn't ignore your sin now, or pretend that past sin never happened. You should *confess* your sin to God. You should repent of it, and turn away from it! Sin *does* deserve punishment, and if you are a Christian, Jesus bears that punishment for you. He already has. That's why the cross is important to Christians, because that's the place and time where he bore our punishment. Look! You don't even need to try and keep it secret – because Jesus offers us forgiveness. Jesus says "There is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be made known and brought out into the open." So bring it out into the open with God now, and *probably*, you need to bring it out into the open with another person too, and seek their support and help.

Later in the service were going to share bread and wine, as we remember Jesus gave his body and blood on the cross for our forgiveness – we are told, before that, we should examine ourselves. So today we will say our confession just before communion, to do precisely what Achan *didn't* do, and come forward to God, admit it and say sorry! God knows already! Because sin is never secret. So don't try to hide it from him.

So we've seen that God is fair, he has no favourites. And we've seen that Sin is never secret. So how can God even have a forgiven people? Every one of us sins, everyone on earth does. And God has no favourites, so why should one person be forgiven, and another not?

That's our final lesson: **3) We must remain in his covenant.**

I just want us to see, in this passage, what hope there is, how could a sinful people stay outside of God's judgment. How could they be his very own people?

And the answer is, we must remain in his covenant. A covenant is a promise made with certain conditions or stipulations. v1 gives us a hint, it already said the problem was that God's people were *unfaithful*, we saw that already. Interesting how God has this cooperate view of his people, because of the sin of one family. But have a look at this: In v6 Joshua falls on his face before God – he's desperate and upset. His warriors have just been defeated. And look what God says to him in v10. Look at v10 "The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face(?) Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep."

Do you see what God is saying? Joshua fears that God is not really with them, he asks "are you not going to stick by us, are you not going to keep your promise" And God says, "don't be so ridiculous, get up you silly boy" "they broke my covenant" "they broke my commands" you need to go and sort it out.

Sinful people need to remain in God's covenant – then they can be saved. Not "Be perfect", but stay in the covenant. The covenant provided a way to be friends with God, a way to be forgiven and escape judgment, and also a way to remain holy and clean. See how in v13 the people can be consecrated! v13 "Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow' God has made provision, you don't have to live perfectly, you can't! Yet through *his way*, you can be consecrated/made clean. And God tells his people how they can do that. *For us, it's through confessing our sins, and following, and living for Jesus.* (With all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, and with all our strength) But the objection comes – ah, but that's unfair! If God gives this covenant to some people but not others, then he's showing favouritism... Ah, I've got you! And the answer is, no, *anyone* can join his covenant people. We saw it a couple of weeks ago.

Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute. The perfect example of an outsider, someone who came from the 'wrong' people, a lady of the night who absolutely violated God's laws – was *able* to turn, seek God's mercy and become part of his covenant people. And it's still true today. Anyone can become a follower of Jesus. No matter what your hidden sin, no matter what you've done. You might have done some truly horrible things, things no one else knows about apart from you and God, and even things which you try to forget about. Even *you* can become part of the covenant people of God. He will forgive even you: completely, totally, fully! You simply need to say, Lord I'm sorry, I've done wrong against you, please forgive me because of Jesus. Please would his death pay for my sin, all of it. And I want to live your way from now on, help me to do that. Amen.

That's it – no favouritism, anyone can join.

You would be *crazy* not to opt into his covenant, and crazy not to stay in it!

Each of us *can* and *must* remain part of the covenant people of God.

Let's pray.

Father thanks that you are utterly fair.

Show us our hidden sin, persuade us, change our attitudes that we wouldn't ever want to hide it.

And keep us all within, or bring us into, your covenant promises, that we would receive

forgiveness, and remain close to you, enjoying being one of your people. Amen