

## SERMON OUTLINE

### “AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”: A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

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WHEN YOU HIDE THE WORLD IN YOUR HEART  
(JOSHUA 7:1)

#### I. **Bringing Our Old Worlds with Us**

- A. You can leave a place, but the place does not necessarily leave you.
- B. The hardest influences to shake off are those of our old home, the World.
- C. The good news: Jesus returned to heavens as our representative.
  - 1. In a sense, we too have been brought out of the World with our Lord Jesus.
  - 2. Let's remind ourselves of two key passages:
    - a. Ephesians 2:4-6: “But God, being rich in mercy... made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [.]”
    - b. Colossians 1:13-14: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...”
- D. Just because God has changed our status does not mean that our hearts will follow our new status right away.
  - 1. We are simultaneously righteous (in Christ) and sinful (in ourselves).
  - 2. Therefore, we need to keep on repenting and unlearning our old ways.
- E. One key lesson our Father wants us to learn from Joshua 7: **We must not cherish the World in our hearts. Instead, we must cherish the Word of God in our hearts and honor Christ as our Lord.**
- F. In the course of our lesson, God will convict and rebuke us for our sins, especially those sins that we love so much.  
—But remember Proverbs 3:11-12: “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) “We are simultaneously righteous (in Christ) and sinful (in ourselves).” How does this truth speak to you? In your view, what are the implications of this truth? (2) What is one key lesson God wants us to learn from Joshua 7? (3) According to Proverbs 3:11-12, how should we take the rebukes of our Father?

#### II. **The People of Israel Broke Faith**

- A. So far, things seem to be going well for Israel—until 7:1.
- B. 7:1 begins with “But the people of Israel broke faith...”

1. The phrase “broke faith” suggests treachery.
  2. And the whole nation did it: “...the *people of Israel* broke faith...”
- C. What is the matter of Israel’s sin?
1. Israel sinned “in regard to the devoted things...”
  2. The “devoted things” are everything in a city that comes under the *herem*-ban of God’s condemnation.  
—We look back to Joshua’s instructions in 6:17-18: “And the city and *all that is within it* shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction....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.”
- D. From those instructions, we see two lessons.
1. The devoted things are “all that is within” a condemned city (with the exception of the gold and silver, which return to the Lord).
  2. If any Israelite takes any of the devoted things, trouble will come on the Israelite camp.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does it mean to break faith? (2) According to Joshua 7:1, who broke faith with God? (3) In what area did Israel break faith with God? (4) Based on the laws of the ban in 6:17-18, what would happen if any Israelite took for himself one of “the things devoted to destruction”?

### III. One Man Did It

- A. How did Israel actually break faith with God 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.”
- B. One man did it and the whole nation became guilty with him!

**\*Questions for reflection:** Let us be more specific. How did Israel actually break faith with God in regard to the devoted things? Who did the sin?

### IV. The Anger of the Lord Burned Against Israel

- A. As a result of that, we read:  
—“And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.”
- B. God’s anger is like a fire, full of passion and intensity.  
—Israel shares in Achan’s punishment as well.
- C. As a result, God allows Israel to lose a battle to Ai (Josh 7:4-5).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What happened as a result of Achan’s sin? How did God respond to it? (2) According to Joshua 7:4-5, how did God punish Israel?

### V. Do Not Love the World More than God

- A. What is the Holy Spirit teaching us today?
1. The fact that Achan chose to preserve some things from one of the Canaanite cities indicates that he loves some aspect of Canaanite civilization, which is symbolic of the evil World.
  2. According to 7:21, the objects Achan stole included...
    - a. a “beautiful cloak from Shinar,” which should have been burned;
    - b. and “200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels,” which should have been brought into the treasury of the Lord.
  3. So one of the main sins here is definitely greed, along with Worldliness.
- B. But there is more to it.
1. The fact that our desires are so great as to cause disobedience reveals that we have made our desires our god.
  2. This is the essence of sin: It’s worshiping your own desires instead of God.  
—Colossians 3:5: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, *which is idolatry.*”

**Achan’s sin was the worship of the World. He loved the World more than God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is calling us to love God above all, and not desire the World which God has condemned to destruction.**

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the Holy Spirit teaching us through this account? (2) Sin comes down to “worshiping your own desires instead of God.” Do you recognize this element in your own sinfulness?

## VI. How Do We Love the World?

*In what way are we like Achan? How are we in love with the World? How are we still hiding the old World in our hearts?*

- A. You can leave the World, but the World tends to cling to you.
- B. Consider Colossians 3:5.
1. The World takes the form of sexual immorality.
  2. The World takes the form of impurity.
  3. The World takes the form of evil and/or extreme desires:  
—“...passion, evil desire, and covetousness, *which is idolatry.*”
- C. But what are some other ways we cherish the World in our hearts?
1. In a conservative Church like ours, we know the most obvious sins—blasphemy, idolatry, sexual immorality.
  2. But we tend to ignore the “respectable sins” (Jerry Bridge’s term).
    - a. These are the sins we don’t really care about because we are too busy looking at ourselves or down on others.

- b. Yet, these sins are remnants of the World in us.  
—They are the “beautiful cloaks of Shinar” in our lives.
- D. What are these remnants of the World that still exert great power over us?
1. The World takes the form of *discontentment*.
    - a. In one sense, we should never be contented with where we are.
    - b. But a discontented heart is not driven to improve out of a love for God or others.  
—It is driven by a desire to look better, or to have more control and security.
    - c. At first, discontentment may look like the pursuit of excellence.  
—Both truly excellent people and discontented people have no problem saying, “We can always do better.”
    - d. But people who desire true excellence will not compromise love. The discontented, however, will.
  2. The World takes the form of *anxiety and frustration*.  
—Anxiety and frustration result when we leave God out of our responsibilities; when we try to become like God and take on more than we should, or expect what we should not.
  3. The World takes the form of *pridefulness*.
    - a. Pridefulness appears as *self-righteousness*.  
—The unspoken mantra of self-righteousness: “If I can do it, so should you” (a.k.a. “Why can’t you be like ME?”)
    - b. Pridefulness appears as *theological pridefulness*—and we Reformed Christians are famous for it. (After all, we are also totally depraved!)  
—Having the best theological system is not the same as living it out—or even believing it fully!
  4. The World takes the form of *unthankfulness*.
    - a. Why are we unthankful?
      - i. Because we feel entitled to the services we receive.
      - ii. Because we really do think that we are that important, and that people exist to serve us with unerring perfection.  
—Unthankfulness results from an inflated view of ourselves, and a reduced view of others.
    - b. Unthankfulness is one of our trademark Singaporean sins.  
—It reflects our self-righteousness and pride, nursed no doubt by an overemphasis on grades, technical performance, and external righteousness.
  5. The World takes the form of *anger*.
    - a. Sins of anger include resentment, bitterness, enmity, hostility, and the bearing of grudges.
    - b. What makes anger so dangerous is that it presumes to take the place of God himself.
    - c. Anger is seductive because it gives us a sense of power.

- d. But this is dangerous because it blinds us to our own sins.
- 6. The list goes on: The World shows up in...
  - a. *sins of selfishness*
  - b. *a lack of self-control*
  - c. *judgmentalism*
  - d. *envy and jealousy*
  - e. *the various sins of speech such as lying, slander, and gossiping.*
- 7. The World shows up in *ungodliness*—the root sin along with idolatry.
  - a. As Jerry Bridges explains, the essence of ungodliness is “living one’s everyday life with little or no thought of God, or of God’s will, or of God’s glory, or of one’s dependence on God” (*Respectable Sins*, p. 54).
  - b. The sophisticated word for ungodliness is “secularism.”
  - c. Until we are finally changed in the presence of Christ, we will still have a soft-spot for ungodliness, the grand philosophy of the World.
- E. Do any of those sins reside in you? Which is your most cherished sin?
 

—The fact that all those sins dwell in us in some way open us to the possibility of our heavenly Father’s loving discipline.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What are the common ways we cherish the World in our lives? Which of those sinful traits do you struggle with the most? (2) Why is ungodliness the root sin?

## VII. Really, Do Not Love the World!

**Because God has chosen us out of the World in Christ (Jn 15:19), he does not want us to love the World or the evil things in it any longer (1 Jn 2:15). If we go on cherishing the World, and do not struggle against it as we should, we open ourselves to the possibility of our heavenly Father’s discipline.**

- A. How could God discipline us?
  - 1. He can cause us to suffer broken relationships.
  - 2. He can allow us to suffer a tarnished reputation.
  - 3. He can allow us to undergo physical and mental illness.
  - 4. He can bring even physical death on us.
- B. But one of the more serious results of God’s discipline is really on the whole Church.
  - 1. Just as Israel lost the battle with Ai due to the sin of Achan, a particular Church can lose its battle with the World because its members are not practicing ongoing repentance.
  - 2. When we see...
    - a. ineffectiveness in our evangelism and discipleship,
    - b. shallowness in our own personal devotional life,
    - c. members becoming more and more worldly/secular in their thinking,

- d. our own church having to close,  
—all those things *could be* part of our Father’s discipline.
- C. What then is the alternative to cherishing the World?
  - 1. It’s hiding the *Word* of God in our hearts.
    - a. Psalm 119:11: “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”
    - b. 1 Peter 3:15: “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy...”
  - 2. Since ungodliness is the root of sin, turning back to God is the beginning of the solution.
  - 3. Granted: God forgives us not because we have enough faith and repentance, but because of Christ.
  - 4. Yet, the call to holiness remains—we must fight to cherish our Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How could God discipline us? (2) How could God discipline a Church for the unrepented sins of its members? (3) What is the alternative to cherishing the World? And what is the solution to cherishing the World?

### VIII. Do Not Abuse the Gracious Acceptance of God

- A. The punishment of Israel and Achan is a dark episode in the life of Israel.
- B. As Christians, we can be thankful that we have even greater assurance of salvation.
  - 1. Because Christ has died, we don’t have to die for our sins—we can be forgiven and God will never reject us in spite of our sins.
  - 2. Paul says in Acts 13:39: “...by him [Jesus] everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”
  - 3. But let us not take God’s free grace as permission to sin.
  - 4. God forgave us so that he could have us back, and that we could have him as our God and Father.
  - 5. Let us return to God and ask him to help us walk more faithfully with him.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Why is God’s free grace not to be taken as permission to sin? (2) “God forgave us so that he could have us back, and so that we could have him as our God and Father.” Do you understand this truth? What should this mean for your life?