

Sermon Outline

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

A DAY OF JUDGMENT (JOSHUA 7:16-21)

I. Introduction

II. The Process of Elimination (Joshua 7:16-17)

- A. Israel’s day of judgment begins (v 16).
- B. Joshua brings Israel toward him, tribe by tribe.
- C. The process of elimination begins (vv 17-18).
 - 1. First, the tribe of Judah is chosen.
 - 2. Second, the clan of Zerah is chosen (v 17).
 - 3. Third, the household of Zabdi is taken.
 - 4. Fourth, Achan Ben-Carmi is taken (v 18).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does the process of elimination unfold? (2) Which tribe, clan, and household does Achan come from?

III. Joshua Confronts Achan (Joshua 7:19)

- A. Joshua speaks face to face with Achan:
- B. As the pastor and father of God’s flock, Joshua would have found it deeply unpleasant to have to confront his own people with their sins.
- C. The fact that Joshua calls Achan “My son” shows that Joshua considers Achan part of the family of Israel and may have affection for him even now.
- D. But the glory of God always comes first.
 - 1. Joshua urges Achan to confess his sin.
 - 2. Joshua urges Achan to “give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him.”
 - a. When we sin, God’s glory is at stake.
 - b. All sin is an attempt to push God’s Presence away, to damage God’s glory.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Joshua calls Achan, “My son.” What does this tell us about how Joshua sees Achan? (2) What does Joshua urge Achan to do? (3) Why would Achan’s confession bring honor to God?

IV. Achan Confess His Crime (Joshua 7:20-21)

- A. Achan responds to Joshua.
—“Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did” (v 20).
- B. Achan confesses his sin.
—“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.”
- C. What should Achan have done with the things that he found?
1. The “beautiful cloak from Shinar” had to be destroyed.
 - a. At this stage in Israel’s history, God wants Israel to treat the clothing of Canaan as symbols of the evil World they’ve left behind.
 - b. To keep the cloak of Shinar is to treasure sin.
 - c. The fact that Achan described the cloak as “beautiful” is telling.
 - i. We are reminded of Eve’s reaction to the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3:6:
—“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was *a delight to the eyes*...she took of its fruit and ate...”
 - ii. Eve *re*-evaluated creation on her own terms, in spite of what God had already said.
 - iii. Something similar has happened in Achan’s case.
 - (A) Like Adam and Eve, Achan chose to *re*-evaluate a piece of creation according to his own desires.
 - (B) As a result, he saw the cloak of Shinar as something to be cherished rather than something to be destroyed.
 - d. We see here the deep psychology of sin.
 - i. What Achan has done is what we all do quite often in our own smaller ways.
 - ii. Sin always begins when we call evil “good” and “beautiful.”
 - iii. Questions:
 - What are some sinful things or actions that you are calling “good” or “beautiful”?
 - Where are you cherishing the World in your life?
 - What is your “beautiful cloak from Shinar”?
 2. What should Achan have done to the gold and the silver?
 - a. Joshua 6:19: “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.”
 - b. The gold and silver represent the best qualities of any human civilization.
 - c. God wants to redeem those precious metals for himself.
 - d. Achan should have brought the silver and the gold to the Lord’s tent.
 3. The root of Achan’s sin is covetousness—greed.
 - a. Achan admits it himself: “...then I coveted them and took them.”
 - b. Colossians 3:5 teaches that covetousness is a form of idolatry.
—Covetousness is what happens when we invest so much value in something that we practically turn it into a god.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Achan respond to Joshua? (2) What crime did Achan confess? (3) How does Achan’s evaluation of the cloak from Shinar remind us of Eve’s sin in Genesis 3:6? What does this tell us about the “deep psychology of sin”? (4) How is covetousness/greed related to idolatry?

V. Judgment on the House of Achan (Joshua 7:24-26)

- A. 7:24-26 has to be one of the most disturbing passages in the Bible.
1. The Lord does not want us to feel comfortable with this Scripture.
 2. God makes no apology for the execution of Achan and his household.
 3. Achan and his family are now being subjected to the same policy of destruction as the Canaanites were.
- B. Yet, it's still hard to read this passage because of the very "personal" nature of the execution.
1. Not just Achan but his whole family is destroyed.
 2. Some will find the *severity* as well as the *extent* of the punishment troubling.
- C. First, let us consider the *severity* of the punishment.
1. Today, stoning and burning are not typical ways by which we execute criminals.
 2. In our modern age with its emphasis on human rights, we believe that even criminals ought to be treated humanely.
 3. But the destruction of Achan raises a question to us rights-loving moderns: "*On what moral grounds do we treat people humanely?*"
 - a. Do we execute criminals humanely because we actually believe that God has told us to do so, or because we have decided, according to our own wisdom, what mercy or cruelty look like?
 - b. Joshua 7 is not necessarily a prescription for capital punishment today.
 - c. But it does challenge us to ask ourselves who defines what rights and dignity looks like.
 - d. We cannot read Joshua 7 without recognizing God himself orders Achan's destruction—and the mode by which it is done (i.e. stoning and burning).
 - e. God does not have a problem with these forms of execution.
 4. While Scripture tells us that humans have rights (Prov 29:7; 31:5), many human rights advocates today do not seem to base their notion of rights on God.
 5. Just as God gives man his dignity; God can also remove that dignity *as* and *when* he sees fit.
 6. Joshua 7 presents a challenge to our cherished secular humanism. —It is a call to let God be God.
- D. Another element we may find disturbing is the *extent* of the punishment.
1. Not just Achan but his whole family and property are wiped out.
 2. But why the whole family?
 - a. Scripture does not answer our question directly.
 - b. Two possibilities:
 - i. Achan's family helped hide the loot and so became party to the crime.
 - ii. Achan was the representative of his household.
 - c. Option (ii) seems better: —If we go strictly by who actually committed the crime, it would make no sense that Achan's property—inanimate objects—should also be "punished."
 - d. Whichever of the two interpretations we choose, the enduring principle here is that God charges fathers with great responsibility.
 - i. By virtue of their roles, fathers can make or break their homes.
 - ii. We can influence our children toward sin or toward righteousness.
 - iii. Families can suffer for the sins of their fathers.
 3. Why does God now require that even the gold and silver be destroyed?
 - a. Wouldn't God require the gold and silver to be redeemed?
 - b. Perhaps God now considers even the gold and silver defiled.
 - c. Achan's sin is so grievous that God does not want anything from Achan's home.

- d. God cares for obedience more than gold and silver (see Isa 1:11-17).
- e. The destruction of Achan's property is a clear statement that God absolutely hates disobedience—especially when it comes from his own people!
- f. The grief that Achan has caused to God is so great that God wants nothing from him. Even the gold and silver are revolting.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does the execution of Achan's household make you feel? Why? (2) What are two options for why God asks for the whole family to be executed? Which is the better option? (3) What question does the destruction of Achan raise for us rights-loving moderns? (4) What could happen if we do not base our notion of human rights on God's Word? (5) Why does God ask that the gold and silver in Achan's home be destroyed? What is a possible answer?

VI. The Valley of Achor (Joshua 7:26)

- A. After the destruction of Achan's household, Israel "raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day."
- B. God wants to show that he has triumphed over Achan's sin forever—which explains the "great heap of stones."
- C. Now that Achan's sin had been removed, "the LORD turned from his burning anger."
- D. But almost as a warning to Israel, the place where Achan is buried is given a name—"the Valley of Achor."
 - 1. The word *achor* means "trouble."
 - 2. Given how close *achan* and *achor* sound, God means for the place to be a reminder of Achan's sin.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the possible significance of burying Achan and his family under a "great heap of stones"? (2) What does the Lord do after Achan's sin has been removed? (3) Why is Achan's burial ground called "the Valley of Achor"?

VII. Christians Need to Live in Constant Repentance

Through this episode in the life of Israel, the Holy Spirit is calling us to be a constantly repenting people. He is calling us to be a people who are constantly and diligently consecrating ourselves for God.

- A. In the first sermon in Joshua 7 ("When You Hide the World in Your Heart"), we said: It's because God has chosen us out of the World (Jn 15:19) that he does not want us to love the World any longer (1 Jn 2:15).
 - 1. If we go on cherishing the World, we open ourselves to the possibility of our heavenly Father's discipline.
 - 2. While this discipline is loving at its root, it is still *discipline*—and therefore, unpleasant (Heb 12:11).
- B. In the sermon on Joshua 7:1, we mentioned the various ways God could discipline us.
 - 1. Broken relationships
 - 2. Tarnished reputations
 - 3. Physical and mental illness.
 - 4. Physical death (1 Cor 11).
- C. Through this episode in the life of Israel, the Holy Spirit is calling us to be a constantly repenting people.
- D. What is your cherished and most enduring sin at this stage in your life?
 - Is it *anger*, because of the sense of power it gives you?

- Is it *impurity*, because of the peace and therapy it promises?
- Is it *greed*, because you think earthly things can complete you?
- Is it *gluttony*, because you are afraid of dealing with pain?
- Is it *anxiety*, because you think you can control your own future?
- Is it *deceit*, because you desperately want people to like you?
- Is it *self-righteousness*, because you like being right—and so feel better than others?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What could happen if we refuse to repent of our sins? (2) What are some ways God could discipline his children? (3) What are some cherished sins? Why do people hold on to them? (4) What are your cherished sins in this stage of your life?

VIII. Consecration through Identification with Christ

- A. Heed Colossians 3:5-10:
—“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.... Do not lie to one another, seeing that you *have put off the old self with its practices* and *have put on the new self*, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”
- B. The way to grow in holiness is by living according to “the new self,” the new identity that we have been given in Christ.
- C. Paul goes on to say in Colossians 3:11: “Here [referring to the new identity] there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; *but Christ is all, and in all.*”
- D. Based on Colossians 3:10-11, we repent by replacing our cherished sins with Christ Jesus himself.
- If our cherished sins are *anger* and *impurity*, repentance means taking Christ as our power and strength.
 - If our cherished sin is *greed*, repenting starts when we ask Christ to complete us.
 - If our cherished sin is *gluttony*, repenting starts when we receive Christ as our peace.
 - If our cherished sin is *anxiety*, repenting starts when we receive Christ as our future.
 - If our cherished sins are *deceit* and *self-righteousness*, repenting starts when we finding our glory and your righteousness only in Christ.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What could happen if we refuse to repent of our sins? (2) What are some ways God could discipline his children? (3) What are some cherished sins? Why do people hold on to them? (4) What are your cherished sins in this stage of your life?

IX. Thanks to Christ

- A. Thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, we do *not* have to die for our sins.
- B. We can thank God that...
1. we don't live under Joshua but under Jesus.
 2. even sins like Achan's can be forgiven by the death of Christ.
 - a. The death of Jesus frees us from sins even the Law of Moses could not forgive.
—Acts 13:39: “and by him [Jesus] everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”
- C. But we must go to Christ.
—And having gone to Christ, we must strive to replace our sins with him.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What could happen if we refuse to repent of our sins? (2) What are some ways God could discipline his children? (3) What are some cherished sins? Why do people hold on to them? (4) What are your cherished sins at this stage of your life?