11-10-24

Joshua 7:1-26

Last week we looked at the story of Rahab and considered the great mercy of God. If it were not for His mercy, none of us would survive because we all deserve to be destroyed in His wrath. We tend to think of God’s wrath as His anger and that is part of it; but it also involves His righteous reaction to sin and evil. Because God is absolutely holy, He requires absolute justice. That is His character, He cannot be any other way. If He changed or acted in any way contrary to His character, He would cease to be God. And that won’t happen because He is the same yesterday and today and forever.

What God’s justice means for us is that He won’t let sin slide. He won’t just let it go. All sin has to be dealt with by His wrath; each and every sin, we can’t try to outweigh the bad by doing more good. All sin must be punished by Him pouring out His wrath upon it. Because we all sin, all of us are subject to God’s wrath; as the Bible tells us, we are “children of wrath”. On our own, we are headed for destruction.

Of course, this is where Jesus comes in; this is where God’s great mercy shine through in the good news of the Gospel. On the cross, God poured out all the wrath that we deserve onto Jesus. He took the punishment that we deserve. In other words, our sins weren’t simply brushed aside. God punished our sins. It’s just that Jesus took the punishment, so God’s justice was served. If then, we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, believing that He is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, then our sins are forgiven us, because the wrath has been satisfied. And how precious it is to know that Jesus was happy to do this for us. He accepted the wrath because He loves us.

The alternative is to reject the gift of salvation that Jesus offers and receive the wrath of God yourself.

Even though we now live in the time after Christ has come as Saviour, we have much to learn from the Old Testament times; and there is much to learn about sin and its effects. One of the main things we learn here is that sin doesn’t simply affect the individual who committed it. It reaches out to others who are innocent of that sin and even unaware that it has taken place. And we can see that in our day to day lives; people commit evil acts, and others are impacted by it.

In this account of Achan’s sin, we have another example of how God holds groups of people responsible for the actions of its members. Joshua had turned to the LORD in confusion and despair, asking why they had suffered defeat. In verse 11 God tells Joshua, “*Israel has sinned*.” Now we know that only Achan took stuff that was under the ban; but God was holding Israel accountable. Especially in a nation such as the United States, this is a very difficult concept since we value individualism so highly.

But we need to get used to how God views things because first of all, this is God’s creation and He gets to choose how to run it. And secondly, because God is absolutely just, we know that His way is right and best. The nation of Israel was God’s covenant people. This was and is a group that is special to God and set apart by Him. The actions of one member can affect the rest of the people.

Notice too that the people of Israel suffered the consequences of Achan’s sin, but Achan himself suffered the punishment. The people of Israel suffered consequences to get their attention so that they could purge the sin and come back into right standing with God. God wants His people to purge sin from their midst because they are to be a holy people. I can’t help but think that perhaps if Joshua would have sought the LORD first rather than just the spies, the disaster might have been averted.

The application for us is the church; both our local church here and the worldwide church of Jesus Christ. Paul talks about the church being one in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, “*For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many*.”

As the church, we are a covenant people of God. We are joined to Him in the blood of Jesus. Although we are made up of individuals, and God knows us each individually, He also sees us as one body. What any of us do, affects the rest. One church member living in sin can interfere with God’s blessing and direction for that church body. Also, if a church body or denomination in the worldwide church turns to sin; we are all responsible to confess and repent and seek forgiveness, so that God will continue His lovingkindness toward us.

Sin is a very serious issue. We Christians who are cleansed by the blood of Christ have the temptation to become complacent. We must never become complacent about the fact that the punishment for our transgressions and sins was poured out on an innocent man; on God Himself. The fact that all our sins are forgiven in Christ doesn’t give us a blank check to sin; it gives us the reason to try our best to avoid sin.

It is instructive to see the sequence that Achen went through during the conquest of Jericho; He saw the items, he coveted the items, then he took the items. You can imagine satan whispering in his ear, calling his attention to the gold and silver and beautiful clothing. It is the same sequence that took place in the Garden of Eden. Satan called attention to the fruit that hung on the forbidden tree, Eve saw that it was desirable, and then she took it. And in the same way Achan’s sin was visited upon all the people of Israel, the sin of Adam and Eve resulted in all the human race being estranged from God. We all have a sin nature inherited from them.

That is a common tactic of satan and one we must be on the watch for. There are lots of things out there that we can’t have for moral reasons. It may be money or an item or an attractive member of the opposite sex; there are all kinds of possibilities. While it is no sin to see any of these things, a problem begins when we look longer than we should. That is satan calling our attention to whatever it is. Our next step is to dwell it. We think about the item or the person and how much we would like to possess it or them.

As a Christian, when we catch ourselves at any point along this path it is time to rebuke satan and repent, refusing to allow ourselves to dwell any longer. To continue to dwell on whatever is forbidden will eventually lead to action; whether it be theft or adultery or murder. Take your thoughts captive; that is an option we have with the indwelling Holy Spirit and because our old man was nailed to the cross with Christ.

In this we can see how important the apostle Paul’s exhortation is in Romans 12, “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*”. The mind is where sin ultimately starts. We may see something or hear something but when the mind takes ahold of it and dwells on it, that’s when it starts to become reality. Our minds must be renewed in Christ; we must have the mind of Christ; and this takes time and work and prayer. It is part of our sanctification process. And while the Holy Spirit is the One who changes our hearts and minds, we must be willing vessels; open to what He has for us.

It is noteworthy that Achan used the word “covet” when he confessed what he did. It is the same word that is used in the tenth commandment that begins “*Thou shalt not covet …*”. If we go back again to verse 11 God says, “*Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant*”. The very basis of the Mosaic covenant was the ten commandments. Achan coveted something that didn’t belong to him. The worst thing is that the things belonged to God.

Everything in Jericho was under the ban; it was devoted to destruction; it was devoted to God. The Israelites would have lots of other towns from which to gain plunder but this first conquered city in the land God was giving them was effectively a burnt offering: it was to be given entirely to God. This meant that every living thing was to be killed, any precious items were to be destroyed, and any metals were to be put into the temple treasury. Achan coveted what belonged to God.

He also broke the eighth commandment when he took the things because he was stealing what belonged to God. Achan was also being deceitful because he hid these things. Achan sinned, and transgressed the covenant for which he eventually paid the price; still, Israel ended up with bitter consequences. As Joshua said to him, he had troubled Israel.

Thirty-six families no longer had fathers, thirty-six mothers had lost their sons, the consequences of Achan’s sin certainly reached further than him. And we have to remember that our sins reach further than ourselves.

Achan did eventually confess his sin and transgression; should that have counted for something? Well, I think our merciful God offered him several opportunities to repent and he chose not to take them. Once back in the camp when he had hidden the items, he had time to think and could have confessed. And then as the lot was cast to narrow down from tribes to succussive families, he could have stepped forward. Each time the lot was cast, he could have stepped forward; but each time he remained quiet, hoping that someone else would take the fall.

Second Corinthians 7:10 says: *For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death*. Sorrow and repentance because of realizing that one has sinned against God is a godly sorrow that will lead to forgiveness. Sorrow because one got caught is a worldly sorrow; it is not sufficient for salvation.

The tragedy further extended to his sons and daughters. His wife is not mentioned. Perhaps he had no wife at the time or perhaps the children were complicit in hiding the stolen items. The Bible doesn’t tell us for sure. Regardless, Achen’s action led to the destruction of his family. In the story of Rahab, God was willing to rescue an entire family on account of one member’s righteous faith. That works both ways.

Achan took items that were part of the ban; when he did that he made himself and all that belonged to him part of the ban also. All that he had was devoted to destruction. Sin is not something to be taken lightly; it only and always leads to death. It hinders our relationship with God and Jesus. It is important to remember 1 John 1:9 which is a beautiful promise to those who follow Jesus: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

In conclusion I want to point out a principle here. Achen is not a type or a foreshadowing of Christ. But there is an important principle that also applies to groups of people for their benefit. Once Achan was removed from the congregation; once the sin was purged, the Israelites were restored to fellowship with God. The guilt was removed from them. Achan’s death was a sort of propitiation for the guilt of Israel.

Likewise Jesus is the propitiation for our sins and guilt. We can have fellowship restored between ourselves and God through Jesus’ work on the cross. It really isn’t fair that we get to go free while Jesus suffered for our sins. But that’s how God works things out in His creation. Praise Him for it.

Prayer

Lord God, we worship You for who You are; unchanging God who is so merciful and kind and longsuffering, yet You are also holy and just. By Your great love, You have made a way for us sinners to be justified in Your sight through the sacrifice on the cross of Your only begotten Son, Jesus. In grace You have offered salvation to us, only through faith in Jesus, a faith granted us by the Holy Spirit. You are one God and You alone save us.

Help us Lord, we become complacent. In our dependence on Jesus our tendency is to lack a horror of sin. Help us to hate sin as You do. May we see the effects of sin and realize what they are. As we see evil increasing in the world, remind us that sin begets sin and any sin of our own adds to its force in this world.

We lift up to You this church body. You have blessed us with each other. You have gifted us as You see fit for the needs of this body. Lord, may we always think of ourselves as one body; knowing that each thing we do affects the others in this church. Help us to be unified in the Gospel, in Your word, and in Jesus Christ our Lord. Keep us in Your truth for there is no other.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen