

# Sin is Serious

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let there be light.

Our Father, as we look at your word together, we recognize that there are many passages, many stories that are difficult.

There are hard things that happen. And we find it hard to understand it. So we pray that by your Holy Spirit, you would shine your light upon your word so that we can understand it.

That we can apply it to our lives. Help us to see it as you see it. And that it would change us and transform us so that we become more like Christ.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this week, after 16 years on the run, Ratko Mladic was arrested and sent to The Hague.

[ 1 : 30 ] That's the International Criminal Tribunal. Mladic was the Bosnian Serb Army Chief during the Bosnian War in the early 90s.

You've probably seen the accounts on the news. He's being charged with extermination, murder and genocide for carrying out the Srebrenitsa massacre in which 8,000 Muslim men and boys were killed.

It was a brutal and violent act. Ethnic cleansing at its worst. And justifiably, Ratko Mladic is now on trial for those crimes.

And he deserves to be punished. Now, as we read through Joshua chapter 6 and 7, we looked at chapter 6 last week, we can easily come to the same conclusions.

Look back at chapter 6 for a minute. Israel have come forward. They've come to the first city that lies on the edge of the Promised Land. Under God's orders, they are told to attack Jericho.

[ 2 : 40 ] Under God's orders. And we read what happens. Chapter 6, verse 21. They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it.

Men and women. Young and old. Little toddlers. Little children.

Cattle. Sheep. And donkeys. Sounds like extermination. Genocide. And ethnic cleansing to me.

And after that, we get to chapter 7 and we read about Achan. One of the soldiers who was involved in taking Jericho. And, well, he just took a few spoils for himself.

A few goodies. Then look what happened to Achan. Chapter 7, verse 25. Joshua said to Achan. Why have you brought this trouble on us?

[ 3 : 45 ] The Lord will bring trouble on you today. Then all Israel stoned him. Then all Israel stoned him. And after they had stoned the rest.

The rest there is his wife. His sons and his daughters. Presumably children there too. They burn them.

They burn them. Sounds like something the Taliban would do. It's barbaric. And it's violent. On reflection, if Joshua were alive today, he would be hauled in front of the Hague.

In fact, there would be loud calls for God to stand trial in the International Criminal Tribunal. As we said at the very beginning, these two chapters are some of the most difficult passages to come to terms with in the Bible.

But we mustn't confuse justice with violence. This is not about a violent, sadistic God who unleashes his anger like a rat go maladage.

[ 4 : 55 ] No, this is a God who is taking sin seriously. And is intent on dealing with sin and working his justice in a rebellious and a wicked world.

Now before we get stuck into chapter 7, let me just show you how this is true. First of all, just go back to Genesis chapter 15.

Genesis chapter 15 verse 16. The context here is God has given his promises to Abraham. He's promised to Abraham that he's going to become a great nation.

He's going to have his own land where all his descendants will live. And he says this in verse 16. In the fourth generation, Abraham, your descendants will come back here.

That's into the promised land. For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. Now the Amorites, they were the people who were living in Jericho.

[ 5 : 59 ] The first city that they came and attacked. And the time span between Genesis 15 and Joshua 6, where the battle takes place, is 600 years.

Year after year, decade after decade, century after century, the sin of the Amorites has mounted up one on top of the other until God says it will reach its full measure.

Year after year, generation after generation, every child that is born grows up to be worse than his parents. And the cycle goes on and on and on, century after century.

Finally, God intervened. And he brought his judgment on a wicked and sinful nation. And Jericho was destroyed.

So this is not a mad general like God, wielding his power in acts of genocide. No, this is a God who is extremely patient.

[ 7 : 04 ] 600 years of patience. But nonetheless, he takes sin seriously. The second passage in relation to this is Deuteronomy 9.

Go to that, Deuteronomy chapter 9. Deuteronomy chapter 9, verse 4.

You see, we could think that as Israel march into the Promised Land, as they attack Jericho, that in some way Israel are better than everybody else, superior, that they're good. And God is pleased with them.

And that they deserve the land. But this is what God says. Deuteronomy 9, verse 4. After the Lord your God has driven them out. That's the Amorites.

After God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, The Lord has brought us here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness. No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you.

[ 8 : 13 ] It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going to take possession of their land. But on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you.

To accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. Understand then that it is not because of your righteousness, because of your goodness, that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess.

For you are a stiff-necked. You're a stubborn people. Yes, God uses Israel as an instrument of justice, not because they were superior, but ultimately because of the nation's wickedness.

In fact, later on as we read through the history of Israel, God would use other nations like Assyria and Babylonia to bring his justice upon Israel. So this is not about a vindictive, violent God who is throwing his weight around.

No, this is a God who is just, who takes sin seriously, and he will deal with it.

[ 9 : 23 ] The judgment that we see fall on Jericho is God's reasoned, fair and just response to ongoing rebellion and sin.

So when we get into chapter 7 of Joshua, we read in verse 1, that the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things that were the spoils.

Achan, son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel.

You see, we shouldn't be surprised if God gets angry with sin. In fact, given what's happened to the city of Jericho, we should be expecting it.

And the big question for us as we look at this chapter is, not why did God do this to these people? The question for us is, why has God not done this to me?

[ 10 : 31 ] Why has he not done it to our nation? If God takes sin so seriously, why does it seem like that right now he's backed off from it all, and he's not doing anything about it?

Well, we'll come back to that later on. But first of all, as we look at chapter 7, we're going to look at the seriousness of sin.

Firstly, the nature of sin. Most people think of sin as just simply breaking divine rules, but it's much deeper than that. Sin is ultimately seeking to live apart from God.

It's about making someone else or something else more important to you than God. Look at how God views what Achan has done.

In verse 11 of chapter 7 of Joshua. He says, Israel have sinned. They have violated or broken my covenant, which I commanded them to keep.

[ 11 : 38 ] They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen. They have lied. And they have taken them and put them with their own possessions. Yes, stealing was going on.

Yes, there were lies. But ultimately, he says, it was a violation or a breaking of God's covenant. Remember, God had rescued these people, and he had committed himself to these people.

He was loyal. He was faithful. He promised to care for them. He promised to provide for them, to bless them, and in return, they were to love God, and they were to reflect God in the community in which they lived.

They had everything they needed in a relationship with God. So to break the covenant, to break that commitment, was saying to God, I don't need you.

I can live without you. Look at how all of this is unpacked after Achan has been caught. Look at verse 20. Achan replied, It is true.

[ 12 : 43 ] I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done. When I saw in the plunder, a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver, that's about five pounds in weight, and a huge wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them.

I wanted them. And I took them. And they're hidden in the ground inside my tent with the silver underneath. You see, the sin is not just stealing.

The sin is not just telling the lies. It's a rejection of God. It's saying to God, You're not enough. I need something more than you. I'm going to replace you with something else.

So when Achan stole, he was replacing God with things and possessions. When Achan told lies, he was seeking his identity and his value outside of God.

What people thought was much more important than what God thought. Sin is making things in people more important to you than God himself.

[ 13 : 56 ] As one writer put it like this, All sins are attempts to fill voids. Because we cannot stand the God-shaped hole inside of us, we try stuffing it with all sorts of things, which only God can only fill.

Now that's not only an offence to God, the God who made us and the God who owns us. Our sin actually destroys the community in which we live.

Replacing God leads to destroying the community. You see, when we choose to live how we want, we say things like, Well, it's my life.

I'll do what I want. It doesn't affect you. My decisions are my own. But the truth is, our choices have a huge effect on others.

Look at Achan. He stole items which he buried in his own tent for a rainy day. But look what happened when Israel went out on their next mission.

[ 15 : 06 ] Back at verse 4. They'd taken Jericho. They were then going to move on towards Ai. And here we read in verse 4.

So about 3,000 men went up. And they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about 36 of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gates as far as the stone quarries, and they struck them down on the slopes.

Why did that happen? Well, we're told in verse 12. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They turned their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction.

I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. You see, the principle here is that one man's sin.

Well, it's only me who did it. It doesn't affect anybody else. But it did affect everybody else. It affected the whole community. And that's the point. Our selfish choices have a profound impact on the lives of others.

[ 16 : 14 ] Go back to how we understood what sin is. How it replaces God with things and people.

So if I make family and home more important than God, if I replace God and make my family and my house more important, then that means I'm going to care less for other families and their needs, and that's what brings about poverty.

If I make getting a highly paid job more important than God, if money becomes so central to my life that I replace it with God, then I will think less of those who are so well paid.

People who don't have as much as me, well, I'll just consider them not really anything significant. If I make finding a partner more important than God, if I make my wife or my husband or girlfriend or boyfriend, if I replace God with them, well, then I'm going to ignore other people and what their needs are.

And that's what's gone wrong in our society and in our culture. And you multiply that over and over again, and we can see that when we replace God with things and people, we begin to destroy the community in which we live.

[ 17 : 39 ] We destroy our own families. We destroy our community. We destroy our nation. The slides that we saw there in Peru, why is there the poverty in Lima?

Because people replace God with things and everything else and people get left out. People aren't treated like human beings.

Sin affects the whole community. And that is why God is taking sin so seriously in this chapter.

That's why in chapter 1, in verse 1, it says God's anger burned against Israel. When Achan stole, he was simply replacing God with things and it affected the community deeply.

So that's the nature of sin. Then there's the problem with sin. It leaves us with two problems.

[ 18 : 47 ] First sin is so serious, it is always going to be found out. Achan thought he had done a good job, didn't he? He managed to smuggle it back to his house, to his tent, dug a hole and he buried the silver and the gold.

Nobody knew. Nobody saw. But God was aware of what went on and he sought to expose his sin. And you could imagine the tension in the camp.

We read about it in verse 16. It's all been made known to the community. Somebody's stolen something. Well, who was it? There were four million of them.

Well, you could imagine the tension. All the tribes were told in verse 16. They all come forward, tribe by tribe, twelve of them all together.

And then they single out the tribe of Judah. The others breathe a sigh of relief. But there's still a lot of them. So the clans of Judah come forward, one by one.

[ 19 : 50 ] And out of those clans, the Zerahites are taken. I wonder what Achan was feeling at this stage. Probably getting a bit sweaty in the palms, I would imagine.

Then the whole clan of the Zerahites come forward by families. All the families are there, one by one. And then the Zimri family are taken out.

And they all come forward, reducing in number all the time. Achan. Think he's going to get away with it?

Then the Zimri family come forward, each represented by the head of the house, the man coming one by one forward, each one going along the line, not you, not you.

Achan. Son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah. was singled out. What was Achan thinking?

[ 20 : 52 ] Did he think he could somehow escape being found out? Did he think somebody else would cover for him? Not tell? Did he think God wouldn't take it seriously and that it just really didn't matter?

Well, the point is, God does take it seriously. And no one can hide from God. It makes us think how stupid we are to try and hide from God or pretend that it really doesn't matter when I tell a porky or when I do something that I ought not to do.

Sin will always be found out. And that's a problem because, second, sin is so serious, it will always be judged. Look at verse 24.

Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan, son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkey, and sheep, his tent, and all that he had to the valley of Achor.

Which means trouble, by the way. He was in trouble. Joshua said, Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today.

[ 22 : 10 ] Then the family were taken out. All his cattle, all his donkeys, everything he owned. And they stoned him. And after they had stoned the rest, his sons and his daughters, they burned them.

Now we find this action violent, don't we? Barbaric. Find it hard to read. Find it hard to stomach.

How could God, a God of love, permit? How could God decree that this should happen? Now while these questions are understandable, and I've gone over, over, and over, and over again this week, our questioning only reveals our own attitude to sin.

The point is, we don't take sin seriously. That's why we think the penalty is too harsh. The reality is the penalty for Achan is so severe because sin is so serious.

And I think his family are all included because, well, they all lived in the tent, they all knew what went on, but they didn't say. In other words, sin against an infinite, pure, and holy God has infinite consequences.

[ 23 : 39 ] And we find passages like this difficult only because we don't think sin is such a big deal. We mess about with it.

We play with it. It doesn't matter. God won't mind. Well, it does matter. And God does mind. And I guess as we think about these issues, there will be those who will say, well, God's not like that anymore.

That's the God of the Old Testament. We're in the New Testament now and things are much better. Things are much different. Well, it's true. Things are very different in the New Testament, but not as we would expect.

In the Old Testament, God's judgment is local and it's temporary, but when you read on and you get to the New Testament, it becomes global and eternal.

God's attitude to sin doesn't lessen. It actually becomes greater as you read on in the Bible. Listen to this, how God's coming judgment on sin will be.

[ 24 : 55 ] If you want to, you can have a look at Revelation chapter 14. If not, just listen. Revelation chapter 14. This is picturing God's judgment upon the world.

Revelation 14 verse 17. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven and he too had a sharp sickle. It's a big sharp blade for cutting things.

Still, another angel who had charge of the fire came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle. And he says, Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine because its grapes are ripe.

The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grape, threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city and blood flowed from the press rising as high as a horse's bridle.

What's that? About four foot? For a distance of 1,600 stadia. That's about 300 kilometers. Quite gruesome, isn't it?

[ 26 : 10 ] Yes, it's imagery. Yes, it's a picture. And the image here is of in the past when people went cutting grapes, they would cut off the bunches of grapes, they would carry them to the great big wine vat and they would put them in the big press and all the slaves would get up on top and they would trample down all the grapes, squishing it all the way down.

And the juice from the grapes would run out from holes in the bottom of the winepress and they would gather it and they would make their wine. Well, the picture here is of God's final judgment coming down into the earth, taking up all the peoples because they are ripe.

Their sin has mounted on top of one upon the other and God has finally intervened. And they are thrown in to this great big wine vat and they are trampled upon.

So much so that the image here is horrific and terrifying. That their blood would seep out through the holes in the bottom, that it would cover 300 kilometers wide and four foot deep.

Yes, it's a picture. Yes, it's imagery. But it's telling us loud and clear that sin is a serious problem.

[ 27 : 41 ] And God will take sin seriously. But thankfully, God has a solution.

Go back to Joshua chapter 7. I wonder, did you notice that when Achan sinned, all Israel were held accountable?

Look at verse 1. It says, the Israelites acted unfaithfully. Achan, son of Carmi, took some of them. And in verse 11, we read, Israel has sinned.

They have violated my covenant. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen. They have lied. Quite clearly, only one person had stolen.

But yet, God's judgment was on the whole of the nation. There was a corporate guilt. If one had sinned, it was counted as if they had all sinned.

[ 28 : 48 ] Now, in our individualistic culture, we find that strange. We find it very unfair. But we must understand God's relationship to the people.

Israel were called to be God's representatives on earth. They were His image bearers. They bore His name. They were to be a holy nation amongst the nations. They were to reflect God's character.

As people looked at them, they were to be everything that God was. So when God saw one sin, it was like the whole community had failed.

Sin was so serious that the threat of contamination of that kind of behavior spreading out through the people had to be dealt with. In other words, they failed to live as God's people.

And isn't that the sorry story of all God's people throughout history? From Adam and Eve onwards, made in God's image, made to reflect His purity, His character?

[ 29 : 54 ] But they didn't. They were shut outside the garden. No one can represent God, it seems, in all His perfection, in all His holiness, in all His purity.

There is no one who is without sin. And we are all under God's terrible judgment. But thankfully, God has His solution.

God is a God of justice. But it is never at expense to His grace, to His compassion, to His kindness, and to His love.

And God longs for a people who would represent Him fully on earth. and in search of a true representative, He sends His one and only Son, the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

He is the one who stands in for us. He is the one who represents for us. Almost as a reverse of Achan, when we see all those tribes come before God, and slowly but surely, it all boils down to just one.

[ 31 : 01 ] It's as if God looks across the world and He says, who will represent me? Not one person, not one nation, not one country, no one. Until finally, it comes down to Christ.

The only innocent, pure, perfect one stands out to represent the nations. And as our representative, that means that what happens to Jesus happens to me.

Jesus so identifies with us that my life becomes His life and His life becomes my life. Jesus comes and lives the perfect life for me.

He lives the covenant that I could never live. He obeys where I could never obey. He lives the holy life that I could never live. But more than that, He dies the death that I deserve to die.

He dies the death that I deserve to die. You know, it wasn't until Achan stepped forward that he admitted his sin, that he came clean, that he was punished.

[ 32 : 11 ] And then the judgment was removed. One had to die for that nation or they all would die. Achan, guilty as he was, died so that the many would not die.

And we're told in verse 26 of chapter 7, then the Lord turned from His fierce anger. Isn't that what Christ has done?

Representing us, treated as you and I deserve to be treated. All our sin, all our failure, Christ saying, I will stand in for you.

I will represent you. And God's wrath, as we picture Christ, is poured out upon Christ. He is trampled on for me.

He is crushed for me. His blood flows instead of mine. One dies so that the many would not have to die.

[ 33 : 21 ] Amen. God has not stopped taking sin seriously. We might think He's backed off.

He's not doing anything about it anymore. But He has. He's intervened by sending His true representative. And the reason why we are not judged in the same way today is because Christ was judged for us.

and we can run to Christ and find ourselves in the safety and security of Him. Where His love is poured out into our lives.

Where we are set free and given freedom to live as His representatives, His people here on earth. To change the world in which we live. To show people where sin has broken down society, where it has affected families, and affected one another.

And we can talk of a solution. We can talk of Christ who dies for us. But who changes us. And creates His church to be a new community of people who will live for Him.

[ 34 : 31 ] Who will reflect Him in His society. Who takes sin seriously. And will treat people the way God has called us to treat them.

These are difficult passages. But yet they remind us of who our God is and all that He has done for us.

Don't let these passages go by without letting the seriousness of it deepen our understanding of what Christ has done.

let's pray. Our Father God, we do come before you humbly.

in the silence we confess our own sin afresh. We thank you for Jesus.

[ 35 : 39 ] That He was trampled on for me. That He was crushed for us. Thank you that you have set us free.

that you have given us a new way to live. Your people representing you here on earth help us to live well for you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing together. you to hear this song gives us an insight into the world in which we live.

The seriousness of sin. How our own individual sin, not just Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 37 : 37 ] Thank you.

Thank you.