

Joshua 7

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Date: 14 August 2022

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[0 : 0 0] scripture text is Joshua 7. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. But the people of Israel broke faith 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, and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Bethhaven, east of Bethel, and said to them, Go up and spy out the land.

And the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few. So about three thousand men went up from the people, and they fled before the people of Ai. And the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men, and chased them before the gate as far as Shabiram, and struck them at the descent, and the hearts of the people melted and became as water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan. O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name? The Lord said to Joshua, Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned. They have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen and lied, and put them among their own belongings. Therefore, the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.

Get up, consecrate the people, and say, Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow. For thus says the Lord, God of Israel, there are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you. In the morning, therefore, you shall be brought near by your tribes, and the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans, and the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households, and the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man. And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel. So Joshua rose early in the morning, and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zarahites was taken.

[3 : 2 2] And he brought near the clan of the Zarahites, man by man, and Zabdi was taken. And he brought near his household, man by man, and Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zarah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and give praise to him.

And tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me. And Achan answered Joshua, Truly I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I did. When I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent, and brought them to Joshua, and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the Lord. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan, the son of Zarah, and the silver, and the cloak, and the bar of gold, and his sons, and daughters, and his oxen, and donkeys, and sheep, and his tent, and all that he

had. And they brought them up to the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today.

And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire, and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day, the name of that place is called the valley of Achor.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. I left a couple of weeks ago on vacation and had the privilege of preaching then from Joshua 4 on the stones of remembrance in which God's people are celebrating all that God had done for them. I guess my vacation is over because I returned to another text with its own heap of stones, not in celebration of what God has done for his people, but God's judgment over what they have done to him. My vacation was more enjoyable than my text, but it's good to be back.

I suppose I ought to title this sermon, The Church in Trouble. From nearly every angle of observable and empirical evidence that can be gathered, this we know to be true, the church is in trouble. We read regularly of her failed moral leadership, insensitivities, as well as immoralities uncovered. There are denominational statisticians that will tell us of memberships in decline across our country. Journalists are doing their investigative reporting and speaking to us about the church's inability to attract and hold young people. Unimpressive conversion and baptism rates are well documented. The church's lack of street cred. The church's inability to have social care are well known, as is her dearth of biblical literacy, even among congregations that have grown up in and with the Bible for decades. The list of evidences proving the church in trouble is overwhelming. However, contemporary writers are not the only ones we can and should be learning from in this regard. There is a story, you've just heard it read, written down long ago about Achan and the people of Israel that by God's means are meant to instruct our course. If there's any solace on the back side of the scripture reading today, any comfort in knowing that the church is in trouble, it's this. It has often been this way.

[8 : 07] Not surprisingly, we find the church in our text in trouble. I'm taking my title really from Joshua's lines to Achan in verse 25. Why do you bring trouble on us?

The Lord brings trouble on you today. In fact, the entire story, and I hope you have it open before you, at least from the way the writer has decided to frame it, is bent on serving the reader to consider the causes of our trouble, the consequences of our trouble, and the cure for a troubled church. Take a look at chapter 7 and verse 1.

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, and the tribe of Judah took some of the devoted things, and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. There, the writer framing for the reader, even before the characters in the story are made aware of the causes and consequences of the church's trouble. If you look at the very back end of the text, verse 26, they raise over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. The causes and the consequences are made known to us at the outset. The fact that there was some cure for it is put down in the anger of the Lord that had rested upon his people now has been removed. I want to look then at the story of this church in trouble along those lines and apply it to the life of the church in our own day.

Nay, more particularly to the life of our church. Causes for the church in trouble.

There are two that I want to look at from verses 1 and other parts in the story. There is a breaking of faith with God.

[10 : 26] Chapter 7, verse 1, but the people of Israel broke faith. To break faith with God means to trespass this covenantal relationship that he had established with us, the demands of which would be required of Israel. There was a breaking of faith, a trespassing.

That is now over the line. There is a sense where they have violated their covenantal relationship with God. The words that the scriptures use in other places actually go even to the extent of not just violating something but making it null, void. Their relationship with God they had voided out, in this case by what they had done with things devoted for destruction. It's not until verse 21, and I encourage you just to flip over and see it. It's not until verse 21 in the midst of the story that you're going to see the specific act of treachery that Achan committed. There he makes his confession. Truly, verse 20, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel. This is what I did.

When I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar and 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold waiting 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. The breaking of faith was Achan's

coveting of these material goods. They were to have been devoted to destruction, to the Lord's treasury, and not to his own material benefit. Covetousness is the singular source in this story of the church in trouble. He broke the 10th commandment.

And he broke the 8th commandment by stealing because in his mind he'd already broken the 10th commandment by coveting. And he did disrepute through his coveting of the other commandment to honor your father and mother and live long in the land for he will live here a very short time in the land for he didn't honor his father and mother. In fact, his father and his father's name and his father's father and his father's father's father are all named. They're all caught up in the dishonorable act of Achan. And you dishonor your parents and don't live long in the land because one covets and steals is by nature a violation of the first commandment wherein they are having other things before God. I could go on and we could see the tangled web in which one sin annuls covenantal relationship in all of its fullness.

He wanted a robe more than he wanted his God. It was a robe from Shinar. It was a Babylonian robe. It was probably beautiful. I mean, if it showed up on your online searches for fall garments, the price tag underneath would have been stunning.

[14:13] He also wanted silver. It says here 200 shekels of silver. I'm not a math guy. You know that well by now, but I calculated yesterday the price of silver, tried to convert it into pounds.

It all depends on whether you're taking troy ounces or something else, and I'm not sure of the difference between them. But he got just under two grand in silver. And then he wanted 50 shekels of gold, equivalent to about a pound and a half of gold on yesterday's market, about \$34,000. In the midst of the attack on AI, he plundered the tent of an individual, grabbed hold of a nice robe, picked up six pounds of \$2,000 silver, picked up a pound and a half of gold. And with about only eight extra pounds on his person, fled. 40 grand plus before God's word.

Interestingly, look at verse 24. Evidently, he had already been a fairly wealthy man. Because when it came time for destruction, the sheep and the donkeys and the oxen, Calvin put it this way, from the enumeration of Achan's oxen, asses, and sheep, we gather that he was sufficiently rich.

And that therefore it was not poverty that urged him to the crime. He coveted the stolen articles, not for use, but for luxury. Oh, I was just looking at a vehicle the other day and the man told me they didn't have available the luxury package. The chip shortage is affecting us all. And for the next year or more, you won't be able to get vehicles with the luxury package, which for me was disheartening. But on the reading of the text may be okay after all, because the pursuit of luxury for luxury's sake is an indication perhaps of a heart that's already wayward in regard to his word.

[16:40] Today's weakness in the church today in the West, generally, in the States more especially, within our own city, certainly, is due to the self-gratifying love of wealth.

And that is why we are ineffectual. This breaking of faith as a cause is amplified in verse 1, not only by the nature of what it was, but by the effect within the larger community. Look at, but the people of Israel broke faith for Achan.

Or, later in the verse, and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel, when we would expect to read Achan. In fact, when God finally speaks to Joshua in verse 10, or 10 and 11, Israel has sinned.

Note this well. The entire church is in trouble on the account, the sinful account, of one man. I've been meditating on that this week.

This is important, and it's a very little understood idea, especially because we are United States citizens who have become Christians. citizens.

[18:26] As citizens, we have a natural bent in our DNA from our outset toward individualism. We struggle to understand that an individual's sin comes at a collective cost.

In fact, we say that's unfair. All the while, as individuals, we have no trouble celebrating in our culture an individual's sacrifice that might bring a collective benefit.

We want our cake, and we eat it too. I'll celebrate the individual when it's good for us all. I will speak of the injustice when an individual has negative consequences on us all.

One I got no problem with. The other, that's not right. I remember how early this gets ingrained as we had five children in the school system, and one of my children, I don't remember which one, came to us at the end of the day, and we said, how was your day?

And they said it was kind of discouraging. That's probably not the word they used, but at any rate, that's the word I understood. We said, what happened? Well, the teacher told us no one's supposed to be talking at a certain time, and one kid just kept going.

[19 : 45] One kid. And then finally, the teacher looked at the whole class and said, today, there is silent lunch for y'all. And my child said, that's not fair.

The sin of one student affecting the collective whole? And the answer in the text is yes. Within the church, it's not quite you are me and I am you, but we are the church.

church. And when I sin, it has consequences on our family. Note also this sin.

Not only is it a breaking of faith, not only is the cause of it collective rather than individual, but notice, it can come from anywhere within Israel's congregation.

They take pains to delineate the lineal line of descent of Achan. Now, if you and I had been Carmi or Zabdi or Zerah or Judah from his grave, we would have said, that should be edited out by the time it hits the press.

[21 : 09] But no, it lets you know that the sin of Achan actually was rooted from in one of the prominent lineal descent lines within Israel.

In fact, the most prominent historical line, Judah, the child of promise. In other words, the sin of the one which affects the whole is actually representative from the most significant voice.

The whole church is undone. The church is in trouble. Take note, though, breaking faith is not the only cause for the church in trouble. In this case, the story begins then at verse 3 and it highlights just by quiet means of narrative storytelling presumptive strength.

The church is in trouble in Israel because she broke faith with God and because she presumed strength with God.

Look at verse 3 and following. The men went up and spied out Ai and they returned to Joshua and said to him, don't have all the people go up, but let about 2,000 or 3,000 men go up and attack Ai.

[22 : 20] Don't make the whole people toil up there. They're few. In fact, the very opening line of our chapter should have indicated they had a sense of presumptive strength in and of themselves.

The word that my text opens with is but however, I mean, we've watched God walk his people into the land. We've watched promises to Rahab begin to unfold.

We've seen triumph over Jericho itself. We've seen the church at a high water mark. The victorious church settled in, accomplished, well fed, but, but, the heart was not right.

Presumptive strength is often the undoing of the church. It's certainly true in the West. It's certainly true in our own mind. Let me bring it to you. Misplaced confidence, self-assurance on what God will and will not do with you or with us puts us in a place of dangerous conflict.

Trouble surfaced on the heels of great victory. Trouble comes after God has done great and wonderful things.

[23 : 51] I mean, the New Testament alludes to this very story in Acts chapter 5 with Ananias and Sapphira, even lexically this word of covetousness and Achan intentionally brought together in the two narratives.

In the early church of Israel, after great movement of God, there is an unsettling of the church's course through private sin.

as it happened again with Ananias and Sapphira. When God does great things, we need to be circumspect most especially.

Causes. Breaking faith, presumptive strength. Causes. Covetousness and self-assurance.

consequences. Well, it's right there. The narrator let us know before he told us the story even.

[25 : 01] Verse 1, and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. In fact, there are three consequences. That's the primary one. Not only does the anger of the Lord burn against her, but also the advance of God's kingdom will be hindered by her, and anguish will be present within her.

Those are the consequences of hidden sin. The anger of the Lord burns against us. The advance of his kingdom is mitigated by us. Anguish of soul and blame begins to rise up within us.

Let me show you there. Verse 1, the Lord's anger is the consequence of sin. We, that is Israel, in this text, is now by way of the perpetrators devoted to destruction.

They have become that which is to be destroyed. Evidently, we serve a holy God.

Didn't we open on that today? Holy, holy, holy. What's that third verse? You know, some of you know it.

[26 : 21] He can't look on us in this state. I suppose in one judicial sense, it's nice to know that God is not prejudicial toward his own people.

If you're not a Christian and you read texts like this and begin to think that this God of Israel is some kind of vindictive God who chooses this person and not that person, well, all you need to know is what he's going to do for Israel what he did for Jericho.

He's unhappy with everyone. people in the house and people not in the house. The anger of the Lord. Somebody were to say to me today, what do you think is the condition of the church and the country?

What are the last few years showing you? the anger of the Lord is burning against us.

No wonder and only that can account for the advance of his kingdom being so ineffectually employed by us.

[27 : 47] And wouldn't the telltale sign be that our souls continue to rise up in anguish toward what he's doing and how he goes about it?

This ought to break our hearts. Broken faith ought to break hearts. Interestingly, it doesn't very often.

the advance of God's kingdom is laid out in verses 3 to 5 by way of its ineffectual nature. Our sin hinders our advance. Not only are they defeated Israel, but they are put to flight.

They begin to lose their members. Their membership roles declined by at least 36 people on account of this one day. They went to funerals and cemeteries rather than to baptisms in the lake. And it's evidence there, this anguish, by the end of verse 6 through 9, that their hearts were now melting. Don't you recall earlier where the word had come from Jericho about Israel?

[28 : 56] All our hearts are melting because we see what God is doing for you? Now, the church folk have become the Canaanites. Their hearts are melting and look at the anguish that is within the heart of Joshua.

What does he do? Verse 6, Joshua tore his clothes, fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening. He and all the elders of Israel, they put dust on their heads and then he offers a prayer.

Interestingly, his prayer is fascinating to me. Verse 7, there's the header, alas, O Lord God, and it's followed, O Lord God, is followed by two questions.

Why have you, and then would that we? God, why have you done all this stuff, and would that we had never walked into it?

We'd have been better off never seeing the triumphant rising of your people and strength in the land. Or, verse 8, then, the prayer doubles up again, the second half, O Lord, what can I say, and then by the time it finishes, what will you do?

[30 : 11] That's the prayer meeting. The prayer meeting is, Lord, why are you doing this stuff? And would that we have never had to deal with this stuff.

And what are you going to do about it? in actual fact, Joshua's prayer mirrors the wording of the Israelites' wilderness prayers under Moses in that they are murmuring and complaining.

It's not so much a prayer as it is an accusation. It's not so much a petition as it is a this ain't right, God, and it's your fault. I'm in a bad way, and I'm hanging it on you.

Interesting to me, the anger of God, the lack of advance, the anguish of soul as made manifest in the calling of a church prayer meeting isn't enough.

As good as prayer is, this one resembles a small group of leadership venting before God for the difficulties they're in the midst of.

[31 : 36] To which God then replies, here's where we move from to cure, we've moved from the causes of it to its consequences of anger, lack of advance, and anguish to the cure itself, and verse 10 is where that actually begins in the story.

The Lord said to Joshua, get up. Why have you fallen on your face? He will say the same thing again in verse 13. Get up. Consecrate the people.

What is going on here by way of cure? Evidently, God is saying, Joshua, enough of your called prayer meeting. It's time for purging.

Now, this is interesting. Get off your knees in this case, and get to the work of purifying.

Stop the worship of me and begin the heart work required for me. Amen. So, God evidently broke up the prayer meeting and told everybody to show up in the morning and consecrate themselves.

[32 : 53] And I want to talk about the cure along two lines. There are two parts that unfold from verses 14 to the end. The first is a time of discovery for God's people, and the second is a time for dealing with that which has been discovered among God's people.

That's the cure for Israel, a time of discovery. There's no need for me to necessarily read verse 14 through 21, but that is the discovery phase.

If you study law, and I don't, there is something that occurs before litigation begins, and it is a season of discovery.

where the evidences that you have discovered that you tend to bring forward for charges are made known to both parties. What's happening here in 14 to 21 is God is now orchestrating by way of discovery all the evidences that prove his point that they have broken faith.

Notice in verses 14 to 19, Achan is taken by Lot. What a fearful day that must have been.

[34 : 15] I tend to think that not coming forward on his own first doesn't bode well for him. I mean, the guy waited until he was called out in public among all the throng of Israel.

Maybe he thought there's no possible way that's coming up. But there it was. Achan was taken by Lot.

Secondly, verses 20 and 21, Achan's hidden sin is finally named. That's what discovery does.

Discovery isolates the soul.

The sin is named coveting. And notice the way he speaks about it. Not just what he did, but the manner in which the storyteller speaks of it.

Verse 21, when I saw, then I coveted and took. Same three words in Hebrew, saw, coveted, took, that echo the garden of Eden when they see the tree and Eve sees it, sees that it's delightful and takes some.

[35 : 41] The writer is intentionally indicating to you that new Israel in the promised land is yet mimicking the original sin which takes root in this way.

We see things, we want things, we take things. And as a result in Genesis, probably here in the story, the result is that though sin came through the one man Adam and it affected all men and women, so too we are now back into the new Eden, Canaan itself and immediately we're back with the same problem.

That while God has saved a people for himself, his people yet require a salvation that would be from within because we're still evidencing the same things.

In fact, it's the same three words that you're going to find later when Israel's king, it like, well now maybe we really got it. And you got David who on the rooftop sees and takes and Israel itself representative through him falls all the way down.

Adam is the representative for us all. Achan is the representative for Israel. David as the ruler is representative for all of God's people both born into the covenant and those who are outsiders who had joined him and we're still waiting under God's anger all through the Old Testament.

[37 : 16] Let me put it to you this way and I don't need to yell it. The universal truth to be told in this story is this. There is a little bit of Achan in all of us.

That's what discovery does. until you can come to a point where you see that I am Achan. We're not ready to apply.

Let me put it to you this way. What are the things that you have hidden behind your door? What is the nature of sins which can actually be named that are quietly swept under your rug?

What are the hidden words that lie restlessly beneath our living room rugs? What are the luxuries that I am pursuing at the expense of bringing in a full tithe to God?

What are the sexual appetites that are practiced in the pitch of dark save the dim glow of a computer screen that reflects back upon the face of the treacherous one in judgment?

[38 : 58] What are they? they? For all of these things things the church is in trouble we have enormous wealth and yet pursue more of it without concern we trumpet righteousness by faith but affect justice not for all the church has adopted sexual mores that are void of biblical norms and for all these things the church is in trouble the anger of the Lord burns and our sins your sins my sins set

God's collective kingdom work back for the past few years God has been relentless in bringing to light the sins within us in an effort to force us into the formal process of exchanging evidence that would condemn us God's discovery phase is complete save dealing with it how do we deal with it 22 to 25 uncover it bring it into the open and dispose of it 22 so the

Lord sent messengers and they ran to the tent and behold it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath they uncovered it verse 23 they brought it into the light and they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the people of Israel and they laid them down before the

Lord notice interesting they laid them down before the Lord everything was done to the Lord and then they disposed of it outside the camp verses 24 to 26 Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah and the silver and all of his family and they brought him up to the valley of Achor they took him away and he said why do you bring trouble on us today let me apply some of these things to us for I do believe that it's time to deal with our sin personally individually it has to be rooted out it's not going to walk out you got to root it out you already buried it you don't plan on bringing it you have no intention of disposing of it but it needs to be rooted out put differently sometimes it's got to be the strength of some other arm pulling that thing out now not everything should be public not every confession should be this broad exposure what you do in your life doesn't necessarily have to be dug up before everybody should be done in its proper place love covers a multitude of sins things but it's got to be uncovered you need to know that God already knows it he already sees it we fool ourselves to think that he doesn't see inside our door psalm 139 oh lord you have searched me and known me you know when I sit down and when I rise up you discern my thoughts from afar you search out my path my line down you are acquainted with all my ways we need to allow God to get behind the fold of our tent the door of our homes the ribcage of our heart what's amazing is our propensity is to be like Achan just to kind of stand still live to see another day there's hope though as a Christian I'm here to say that while the sin of any one of us implicates all of us the obedience of the one God sent for us is strong enough to absolve us this is what the scriptures teach in full that the Holy Spirit of God is what brings things to light that the Holy Spirit can bring it to light the son's obedience can cover it at the cross making full payment for it don't forget that the father disposed of your sins on his son outside the city gate and he will promise to remember your sins no more not that he doesn't know they're there he does he doesn't have amnesia on your sin but because your sin has been fully satisfied in the death of a perfect substitute that

[45 : 33] Adam was incapable of doing that Achan fell short on that David didn't accomplish but that in Jesus Christ the full obedient son of God who took your sins upon himself actually now absolves you before the father so don't argue to me how is it that one man has bad stuff for all of us because you want that good news of gladness that through one man we can all of us be forgiven I could go to 1 John 5 where it talks about if you confess your sins you have one that's faithful and just to forgive you your sins that's the point of that whole part there in 1 John 1 5 through 2 12 is that isn't it good glad news to know that somebody can take care of this for you that you can go from the church in trouble to the church triumphant that you can have a right standing with the

Lord but perhaps this is why revival is so rare in church history everybody is looking for revival today you're going to read more about it because people are going to begin to realize we need it but it's going to require these very things of discovery and disposal which is why it comes so infrequently there are not many seasons when every individual will in the church is committed to the hard work that would bring about collective purity revival begins with the personal work of purging I've seen it a couple times in my life Peter experienced it at his early sermon there in Jerusalem when it says the people were cut to the heart and they go what do I do now repent be baptized come into the family through

Christ the irony of course with our individualism is that we are growing increasingly intolerant of one another but almost tolerate anything within ourselves verse 26 then the Lord turned away from his anger but not until then not for them and certainly not for us so I return from vacation to announce the good glad news of an advocate of Jesus Christ that stands before you but one that in this text would cause each one of us to search our hearts why because we're in this together we're in this together search our hearts there's much at stake do the work of discovery deal with it it's within your reach to choose trouble or triumph and the key is in the hands of every congregant he knocks may the door be open that he would have fellowship with us our heavenly father a heap of stones to help us consider the weight of the work you have before us

I pray for myself for every man woman and child under the hearing of my voice in this moment that you would humble us help us make us intolerant of all that we see rising up within us that your anger would be turned that the advance of your ways would be known that our anguish would be turned to shouts joy we give ourselves to this in Jesus name amen to this to this time to this time to this thing time!