

Presuming on the Promise

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Our Father, thanks so much for your word, the Bible. We thank you that you still speak to us through it today. And Father, we just pray that you would help us tonight with some things that are difficult to hear, but still truths that we need to take to heart.

And so, Father, we pray that you would help us do this, that we might continue to live as your people, holy and pleasing to you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, in life, we can make all sorts of presumptions and assume how we act doesn't matter.

So one night, my wife was watching a TV show called You Are The One. Is anyone in it? Yes, have you heard of it? It's apparently a Chinese dating show, which has apparently replaced the dating service in China.

No? Okay, that's what I was told. So on the next slide is a picture of what the show looks like. There's a guy who comes in and you've got a number of women and they can either stay on or they can buzz out if they don't like his answers.

But you can get some quite amazing comments on there. And so one guy was talking and a girl said this in response. You're 24, too young to me, but you said you have an older brother.

[1 : 19] Is he married? Oh, poor guy. The next slide. This girl says, I'll be devoted to my boyfriend as I am to corn. And you can see the guy thinking, how much do you like corn?

This could be good or bad. Some guys are just plain presumptuous. So this next guy says that I've never failed at getting the girls I want. Kidding.

Or the next slide. My biggest shortcoming is that I have no shortcomings. And I love the girl's response to this guy on the next slide. There's a fine line between self-confidence and arrogance.

Needless to say, they went home dateless. But you see, in life we can be presumptuous and assume the way we act does not matter. And today we see a rather disastrous example of this.

For Achan presumes upon God's promises of the land and assumes it does not matter how he acts. But we'll see that it matters quite a lot.

[2 : 24] But before we get there, remember what we saw last week. We saw God bring down the wars of Jericho. It was a great victory for the Israelites and a reminder that God is God. He will keep his promise and give them the land.

But what we skipped over rather quickly was back in chapter 6, verse 17. So just turn back a page to chapter 6, verse 17. Because this is really the background for our chapter tonight. So chapter 6, verse 17.

This is the command that God gave through Joshua. The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise, you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it.

All the silver and the gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury. Now, the word devoted here means to be devoted to destruction.

[3 : 37] And so to devote these things to the Lord means giving them over to God for destruction, for judgment, in effect. It's similar to what your footnote says at verse 17.

And next is the word devoted there. Now, it's a reminder that everything belongs to the Lord. He is the creator and owner. And as we heard last week, he is God. And so he can do as he sees fit.

What's more, we answer to him, not him to us. And so what God is doing here is he's exercising his sovereign right to call these people to account and to have them answer for their sins.

Like a car manufacturer who recalls defective cars to be destroyed. Well, so God is recalling these defective people to be destroyed because of their sin. Now, again, I know it seems harsh to us, but we must remember the points from last week, which I'm not going to go over tonight.

Of course, it's a bit hard to destroy gold and silver and bronze and so on. You can melt them, but it's a bit harder to destroy them. And so they were to go into God's treasury.

[4 : 43] Now, it's not God being greedy. It's not God saying, kill everyone, but give me all the gold. Although, actually, he is the owner of the earth, and so it's his gold anyway.

But rather, it's the fact that you can melt metal, but you can't utterly destroy it. And so it goes into the treasury instead. It becomes sacred to God. But the question is, why do animals and metal need to be devoted to God in the first place?

I mean, how does a gold cup sin? Or how does a donkey sin? We heard that last week, that even the donkeys are to be killed. Why are they to be devoted? Well, here we need to understand that the actions of some impact the whole, for good or bad.

It's this idea that we are connected, and so what we do impacts others. So think back to the recent Olympics, for example. There were some great moments.

One of my favorite moments was Usain Bolt winning almost effortlessly, and he even smiled for the camera. I think on the next slide, that's how I got this shot. He's so cheeky. Look how far ahead he is.

[5 : 46] He's just walking the park for him. And now, unfortunately, our Olympians didn't do so well. But when they did win gold, we would say, we won gold, wouldn't we?

Even though we did nothing except sit on the couch and watch the TV. So why could we say, we won? Well, because we are connected as Australians. They are our representative as Olympians.

And so what happens to them, win or lose, happens to us. We win or lose. I'm from Sydney. And so after yesterday's footy match, I lost.

You see, their actions impact us as though they are our actions. We are caught up with their success or failure because we're connected. And it's the same here.

The judgment of these Canaanite adults means judgment for their children, their animals, and even their belongings in this case. Why? Because they're all connected as Canaanites. Canaanites. And what happens to the adults as the representatives of their households?

[6 : 48] Well, happens to their households, including their animals and belongings. It's why the sin of Adam affects every human being because he was our representative in the garden.

And we are all connected to him as humans. It's why the sin of Achan affects his whole family because he is their representative and they are connected to him as his family.

In fact, that's why the sin of Achan affects the whole of Israel since they are connected as Israelites. So Achan's sin means God can say that Israel has sinned.

So if you look at verse 1, point 1, verse 1, chapter 7. He says, See, Joshua, who is writing this account, says Israel was unfaithful to God.

And that God's anger burned against Israel. And yet in between this description of Israel's sin and judgment, we have the individual who is the real culprit, Achan.

[8 : 08] You see, the Bible acknowledges both the corporate and the individual. And it acknowledges the connection between them where the sin of the individual can impact the whole. And to highlight this connection, did you notice that we're given Achan's family tree?

Did you notice that? It's an odd detail to include, isn't it? I mean, not even Joshua, the great leader of Israel, is given this family history.

So why are we told Achan's family history here? Well, to show that the individual Achan is connected to Kami, who's connected to Zimri, who's connected to Zerah, who's connected to Judah, and to the tribe of Israel.

Well, it sounds like that old song, you know, the left knee's connected to the, or whatever it is, whatever it's connected to. But that's the point here. There is a connection. And because of this connection, the sin of the individual can impact the whole, such that the whole shares in that sin.

Well, verse 1 is a summary verse. Now we're given the details of how this all played out, which brings us a point to verse 2. Now, Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Bethhaven, to the east of Bethel.

[9 : 22] And he told them, go up and spy out the region. So some men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, not all the army will have to go up against Ai.

Now, I just send two or three thousand men to take it, and do not weary the whole army, for only a few people live there. Now, in verse 2, Joshua sent some spies, which sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Back in chapter 2, he did the same thing. But back in chapter 2, I suggested that it was actually a lack of faith in God. And so I suspect him doing that here is actually a bad sign.

What's more, the spies come back and say, you don't need to send everyone. A few thousand will be enough. But since when has common military tactics been the order of the day?

I mean, were they supposed to rely on common military tactics at Jericho? No. This, I think, is another bad sign that something is not quite right here.

[10 : 27] What's more, who is missing in verse 2 and 3? Who is not part of the discussion on military strategy? God. Does God command Joshua, or does Joshua inquire of God?

No. So this, I think, is a third bad sign that something is not quite right. And I think we're meant to see these as bad signs, especially after verse 1, where we are told explicitly that something is wrong.

And sure enough, they finally work it out for themselves. Do you see verse 4? So about 3,000 went up, but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about 36 of them.

They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this, the hearts of Israel melted in fear and became like water.

Now, it's almost a comical picture here. Israel are defeated by a few people. Remember verse 3? Don't send too many because, verse 3, only a few people live at Ai.

[11 : 33] And yet these few people of Ai defeat the few thousand Israelites. Though notice, God limits their casualties to 36. Now, any loss of life is bad, but in military terms, it's not a massive defeat.

It seems God is showing some grace here. Of course, it's not what they were expecting, is it? But instead of trying to work out why this happened, Joshua seems to throw a bit of a tantrum.

Have a look at verse 6. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down to the ground before the ark of the Lord. My kids have done that in a shopping center when they were younger. And Joshua said, Now, to be fair, Joshua, you know, does tear his clothes and bows before the ark as a sign of humility.

That's what putting the dust on their heads is about as well. And he does address God reverently. You know, alas, sovereign Lord. He appeals to the honor of God's name. So some people think we have Joshua, a good example in Joshua here.

But I'm not convinced, personally. I mean, he also says in verse 7, Why did you bring us here if only to destroy us? And if only we had been content to stay beyond the Jordan.

[13 : 19] Now, does that sound familiar? Isn't that what the first generation of Israelites said when they came out of Egypt, when they didn't trust God? God, why did you bring us out of Egypt?

Only to let us die in the desert. And so I suspect we have Joshua who has again failed to understand his need to trust and obey God. And not to presume upon God's promise himself.

Especially given God's response. I think it's a negative picture because look at how God responds in verse 10. The Lord said to Joshua, You see, Joshua needed to remember last week where he met the commander of God's army who said that God is not for Israel nor against Israel.

That is, God is not owned by anyone, including Israel. And so he must not be taken for granted or presumed upon. Rather, he's to be trusted and obeyed.

And so it doesn't matter if you're an Israelite or a Canaanite. God shows no favoritism. If you do not trust and obey him, then you are liable to destruction. And so the sin of Achan that has contaminated the whole of Israel so that the whole of Israel is now liable or devoted to destruction, just as God said would happen back in chapter 6.

[15 : 03] And so God will no longer be able to be with them, he says in verse 12. Why? Why? Or because a holy God cannot mix with a people contaminated with sin.

It's like the old illustration. I've used this at Morning Church a couple of years ago. It's the old oil and water trick. So here's some oil and water.

It doesn't mix. Like I can shake this up and it looks like it starts to mix. But if I leave it here on the table, as long as you don't get too distracted, it's already starting to separate now.

Okay, so the whole idea is just as oil and water cannot mix no matter how much you shake it, so a holy God and a contaminated people with sin cannot mix.

And so God cannot be with them anymore, which is a huge loss if they're supposed to be taking the land. And in fact, it gets worse. They are now liable to destruction themselves.

[16 : 01] Well, God has told Joshua the real problem, which is sin. And now God tells him the solution. So point three, verse 13. He says, go, consecrate the people.

Tell them, consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow. For this is what the Lord your God of Israel says. There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.

In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the Lord chooses shall come forward clan by clan. The clan the Lord chooses shall come forward family by family. And the family the Lord chooses shall come forward man by man.

Whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done an outrageous thing in Israel.

Now, we're not sure exactly how God chose each tribe and family and man, whether they cast lots or rolled the dice or that kind of thing. Either way, that's what happened in verses 16 to 18, where the story is repeated.

[17 : 08] But notice God's method here actually gives Achan time to repent if he wanted to. I mean, to go through 12 tribes and thousands of people took time.

But Achan remained silent. He refused to come forward until it was too late, until he had no choice. See verse 19.

Then Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done. Do not hide it from me. Achan replied, It is true.

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, a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took.

Or I desired them and took. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent with the silver underneath. Achan saw a beautiful robe.

[18 : 11] I kind of immediately think of those hotel, luxury hotel robes, but I think it was quite it. He took two kilos of silver, half a kilo of gold. And Achan saw and he desired and he took.

Sound familiar? In Genesis 3, Eve saw the fruit. It was desirable and she took. You see, no sooner has God created a place for his people to enjoy rest with him, which was the garden, sin enters and spoils everything.

So as Adam and Eve must leave the garden, leave God's rest, no longer to be with God, so also here. No sooner has God brought them into the promised land, the land of rest, as we saw last week, that representative Israelite sins contaminates the whole nation.

And now a holy God can no longer be with a sinful people unless that sin is dealt with. And so that's what they do. In verse 22, they find the things in his tent.

And in verse 23, they spread these devoted things before the Lord. It's as though they are giving them back to God to be devoted to God for destruction or the temple. And then that's what happens in verse 24.

[19 : 19] Do you see there? Then Joshua, together with all of Israel, took Achan, son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had to the valley of Achor.

Joshua said, Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today. Then all Israel stoned him. And after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.

Over Achan, they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore, the place has been called the valley of Achor, which means trouble ever since.

Achan and everything he is responsible for, his household, whom he has contaminated, dies. Of course, this is what Israel agreed to back in chapter 1, verse 18.

They agree that whoever disobeys should be put to death. And in verse 25, there's a sense of justice here where Joshua says trouble for trouble.

[20 : 22] You've brought trouble on us, so you'll be paid back with trouble. But it still seems unfair to us, doesn't it? Yet we must remember that God will judge the family fairly in the next life, which is the one that counts.

And there's also a hint that they might be dealt with differently to Achan. Because if you look at verse 25 and 26, you notice how Achan seems to be dealt with separately. First, they stoned him.

And after they stoned the rest, there seems to be a singling out of Achan to be dealt with separately, as though to acknowledge that he is the real culprit.

But because he is the representative of his household, what he did impacted them. And so they named the valley Achor, which means trouble. Now, it's not a particularly happy ending to chapter 7, is it?

And Achor is not really a place you'd want to live. I mean, oh yeah, I live in trouble. It's not a nice place to live. And yet God is still determined to dwell with his people.

[21 : 25] To bring hope out of trouble. And to offer a way to deal with sin so that he can be with us. And so sometime later, when Israel sinned again, God said this through the prophet Hosea on the next slide.

He said, I will give her back, that is, Israel back her vineyards. And I will make, notice, the valley of Achor, no longer a valley of trouble, but I will make it a door of hope.

I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and in compassion. You see, sin has contaminated us and separated us from God, but God still really wants a people he can be with and whom he can bless.

So he promised a door of hope, a way back to him. And he kept that promise, of course, in Christ. For at the cross of Christ, Jesus himself was devoted to destruction for our sins.

And so just as Adam impacts all who are connected to him as human beings, you know, we have a sinful nature just like Adam. So Jesus' death on a cross impacts all who are connected to him by faith.

[22 : 36] In other words, we who believe in Jesus will be saved from being liable to destruction for our sins. We who believe in Jesus can have a holy God being with us, guiding us in this life and bringing us to our promised land in the next.

So the first question for us tonight is, have we come to Jesus? Do we trust in him? Do we believe he is real and really did die to pay for our sins?

That he really did rise again, proving he can offer us the hope of heaven? Do we believe in Jesus? For us who do, then there are three lessons for us, all which have to do with the seriousness of sin.

Because if you've not got anything else from this chapter, you surely would have gotten that. And the first and big lesson for us is, don't be an Achan. Don't presume upon God's promise of forgiveness and think that sin doesn't matter.

It does matter if we persist in it. If we ignore God and keep persisting in sin, then we will be liable to destruction. In fact, these solemn words from Hebrews on the next slide, this is what it says.

[23 : 49] It says, if we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

See, Achan was part of God's people. He knew about God and his promises, and yet he persisted in his sin. Remember, he didn't confess until he absolutely had to, right at the end.

But even though God gave him plenty of time to repent and to ask for forgiveness, I wonder what would have happened if he'd done that. Instead, he kept quiet, no doubt hoping he would not be found out and that he would get to keep his goods.

But in so doing, he didn't acknowledge his sin. He persisted in it until it was too late. I remember at university, there was a person who was part of the Christian Union group, and they were saying to me that, you know, it's okay if they kept going out and getting drunk, because God would forgive them anyway.

After all, they go to church and see you. But you see, that's being an Achan, persisting in sin as though it doesn't matter. And so presuming upon God's promise of forgiveness.

[25 : 07] In the end, it shows their faith is not genuine. So that's the first thing. We're not to be an Achan and persist in sin. Second, while God will judge us according to our own sins, we are still connected.

And so sometimes our sin can still impact others. So at a friend's church some years ago, two youth group leaders were dating. He was in charge of the whole youth group, and his girlfriend was looking after the older girls, and they started sleeping with each other.

Now, the guy tried to justify it by the classic line, well, we love each other, so what's the problem? And before long, the church minister heard that there were other Year 12 couples talking about doing this for themselves.

After all, if their leaders were doing it, it must be okay. You see, their sin was starting to contaminate others. Or at another church of mine, a person had an affair, left his wife for another woman, and his sin impacted his family in a huge way, as well as his church family.

The family and the church family kind of almost suffered some of the consequences of his sin in terms of hurt and pain, because they were connected, you see.

[26 : 26] I'll take Paul's own words in 1 Corinthians 5 on the next slide. Paul hears about a guy in the Corinthian church having an affair, and he's worried about the sin impacting others, contaminating others. And he says this, Don't you know that a little bit of yeast works through the whole batch of dough?

It contaminates others, it spreads. And so he says, Expel the wicked man from among you. You see, our sin can still impact others. And so we're to work at getting rid of it, not just for our sake, but for one another's sake.

And thirdly, Given sin is serious and can contaminate others, then we're to say sorry for it. We're to ask for forgiveness, and devote it to destruction.

Here's where we come to our second reading, and we'll finish here. So please turn to page 1184, to our second reading. Here Paul reminds them that what Christ, our representative, has done has impacted us.

So in verses 1 to 4, we have died with Christ, we've been raised to new spiritual life with Christ. In fact, we've already been seated with Christ above. And then he says later on in verse 12, that we're now God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

[27 : 43] So we're to live that way. But in between that, notice what he says in verse 5. He says, Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived, but now you must also rid yourself of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

And so it goes. But do you notice the strong language in verse 5? We are to put to death. That is the same as devote to destruction.

For we have died to sin, being raised with Christ. What's more, God's wrath will devote these things to destruction on judgment day, so get rid of them now, is his point. And put to death whatever sin you find in your life.

It can be little things, it can be big things. I heard of a young woman who used to bite her lip every time she started to gossip about someone or slander someone. She even bit her lip too hard one time and made it bleed.

[28 : 55] But she told me that was actually good because it made her forget about what negative comment she was about to make. But you see, he was a person who was determined to put to death the sin of gossip in her life and to live out her new life as one of God's holy people.

You see, God promises us forgiveness and life in our own promised land. And those promises ought to bring us great comfort and hope. But we must not presume upon them thinking that we can persist in sin as though it doesn't matter.

For it matters so much, in fact, that it took Christ's blood and only Christ's blood to deal with it so that God could be with us and make us his holy and dearly loved children.

And so may we be a people who treat sin just as seriously. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this solemn reminder that we are not to presume upon your kindness in forgiving us and sending your son Jesus to die for us.

And so, Father, in response to your great kindness to us, help us not to persist in sin but to ask for your forgiveness, to put it to death and to live our life for you.

[30 : 23] And Father, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.