

Be Strong

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 April 2015

Preacher: Chris Jones

[0 : 00] It was a very serious trouble, and it's a pretty horrible punishment. But don't forget that 36 other families mourned their loved one as a consequence of Aiken's failure.

I'm about to talk about anger, and I think I'm wondering if you just turn to one another for two minutes. So really quickly, not a lot of detail. Just turn to one other person and share a time when somebody was seriously angry with you and what that felt like.

Move quickly to what it felt like. Okay. A few things come to mind for me, some of them funny and some of them not so funny at all.

The unfunny one is getting a hiding from my dad at the same time as he's trying to express regret for having to give a decent son a hiding. That didn't feel nice at all. I remember when I was 13 or 14 years old, we lived at Collaroy Platter over on the northern beaches, and I was allowed with my friends to go canoeing down on Narrabeen Lake.

A couple of my friends had canoes, surf skis, and they had little wheels and trailers to take them down on. So they towed them down the hill into the lake, and off we went, and we were three hours late.

[1 : 35] And parents were out looking for us, and it was in the days when there were no mobile phones. And probably very oblivious to the time, but I knew we were in trouble, because as we were coming back up the hill to Collaroy Platter, halfway up a very steep hill, towing these things behind us, one of my friend's mums came down the hill very slowly in her car, with her head out the window, and I can tell you she had a really ugly look on her face.

And she was shouting at my friends, saying, you're going to get the father of a hiding when you get home. And then she looked at me and she said, and your parents are so filthy angry with you. And so I had to walk the next probably kilometre home full of fear and dread, anticipating the wrath of my parents and what that would mean.

What could I do to turn their wrath away? I think I tried tears. I'm not sure if it worked on the day or not, but that's what I did. I've also stood in a very serious place, floor of Sydney, not Sydney Synod, but another diocese.

And I said some things, sort of in innocence, that the bishop really didn't like. And he left his chair and he took the floor.

And I said them with Steve's old box. The man who disciplined Steve nurtured him when he came to Christ. The two of us were ministers and we both spoke on this matter. And the bishop was so incensed, he left his chair, he took the floor of the Synod.

[2 : 59] And I said my bit. And before I could even sit down, he was on the other side of the Synod hall, snorting, raging, saying that they were the most unfair men and most unfair things that he had ever heard on the floor of Synod.

So I felt like I'd better stand there and take it. So I just stood there and eyeballed him rather than sit down. And when he'd finished tearing us apart, one of my friends who was sitting behind me starts going, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da.

As funny as it is now, it was a horrible moment. And going away afterwards, processing somebody's anger and knowing what it's done to you and what's going on inside you.

But it's not just me. All of us have had serious... I imagine all of us have experienced serious anger from other people and what it does to us.

And I guess how we deal with it. So it might be a parent or a teacher screaming at you in anger. Or a boss who's ripping you to shreds and humiliating you for the work that you've done or haven't done.

[4 : 10] Or it could even be within your family when things get really tough between a husband and wife even. And things get said in an uncontrolled and deeply hurtful way.

In all those things, there's a question of, what do you do with that? You may well be the offender. You may well have caused the anger that's come to you.

You may not have caused it, but you might have caused the anger that's come to you. And so, how do you deal with it? What do you do? How do you turn that anger away?

Joshua 6 finished with a really stunning victory. It's where we were last week. I'd love you to have your Bibles open, Joshua 7. This morning when I preached this, I quoted the text quite a bit more. And then when I got into the Chinese services, I found it was helpful not to quote it quite as much because it takes too long. So I'm going to try a little bit differently tonight. I might not quote as much as I normally do, but I'd like you to be reading and following with me.

[5 : 13] Joshua 6 finished with God's stunning victory. He brought down the walls of Jericho. He handed the city to Israel. Rahab was saved. Joshua 6 was just a good news story.

It was just good all the way through. And this most stunning victory. And so when you get into Joshua 7 and you hit the very first verse, you find that God is hot with anger.

And you wonder, why on earth? And it says something like this. The Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things. Achan, the son of Kami, 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. And that's like, whoa, where did that come from? God's anger burns.

He's furious with his people. It's really surprising. And at this stage in the story, even Joshua doesn't know anything's wrong. Now, God had warned them in chapter 6 and Joshua had warned them in chapter 6 about how to treat the spoils of war from Jericho.

[6 : 19] You're not to keep them. Everything, people, animals, precious metals, everything is to be devoted to the Lord.

That means living things killed and burned. And all the precious stuff in terms of metal and jewels and stuff into the treasury, the Lord's treasury.

And I said last week, Jericho was God's judgment on the Amorite inhabitants of the land. And it was also his victory on behalf of his people.

And what you get is this picture of to the victor go the spoils, winner take all. And in this case, in this victory, all glory to God who won this victory.

So he gets the lot, everything. And then you hit this Joshua 7, 1, and it's like this enormous hiccup, but worse than a hiccup.

[7 : 18] And it's also an explanation because before we read the whole of this chapter, we're being told in verse 1 what the problem is. One man, Achan, acted unfaithfully with regard to the devoted things.

One man does something wrong. God is angry with the whole nation. Achan's sin is secret, it's hidden, but it impacts the entire community.

So he set the ground. Verse 1 tells the story behind what is about to be seen as we go through chapter 7. So moving into verse 2, they've won their first victory.

They're now ready for the second. They suss out the city of Ai. They take a force of 3,000 men, quite a few less than before. And they are routed by the men of Ai who kill 36 Israelites.

And 36 families lose their men, and they are in mourning that night. And Joshua and the leaders are devastated.

[8 : 23] And Joshua is flat on his face before God. He's grieved, and he says, why did you allow this to happen to us? They'll surround us. They'll wipe out our name.

And if they wipe out our name, what's going to happen to yours? He's perplexed. He's confused. He trusts God, but he can't see or understand what God is doing, and he's really fearful of what's going to happen. And now they take this enormous confidence as a nation.

They know what God has been doing for them, and now they take this enormous hit. And they really don't know where they stand with God. And in this moment, it is like relationship with God is just too hot to handle.

Who are you, God, that you would do this to us? Humanly speaking, it seems unfair. It's like keeping the whole class in, waiting for someone to own up when money got pinched from the teacher's handbag.

[9 : 27] Only one person offends, but a whole lot of people are affected by the offence. Something similar happens in Acts chapter 5. The early church has been growing by thousands since the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Acts 4 finishes with the wonderful description of believers being of one heart and mind and sharing their possessions and quite extraordinary acts of giving.

So Barnabas, who will be heard a lot of later, but Barnabas, named by the apostles as the son of encouragement, sells a field and brings the proceeds in to bless the whole community and they're providing for one another's basic needs.

This is a wonderful new experience of being the people of God. And then one verse later, you come to the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They fake their Christianity. They fake their generosity. And God strikes them dead. And it says, Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

[10 : 31] In some ways, the consequence for the church, for all of God's people, was quite healthy. Because even though they hadn't done anything wrong, they did receive, they did experience a terrible reminder that God is God.

He doesn't play favourites. He calls the shots. We don't. And the sin of one couple had an impact on the entire community.

Joshua was on his face before God. And God answers Joshua pretty abruptly.

Stand up. What are you doing down on your face? Israel sinned. They violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They've taken some of the devoted things. They've stolen.

They've lied. They've put them with their own possessions. That's why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They turn their back and run because they've been made liable to destruction. Oh.

[11 : 37] But have some sympathy for Joshua because this is the first time he's even told by God that something's wrong and what it is. God brings what is hidden into the light so that it can be dealt with.

There's sin in the camp. He uses the plural to say the whole nation is being held accountable for what has happened. They have sinned. They have taken devoted things.

They have stolen. They have lied. Can you imagine being back in school and somebody pinches stuff and we've got the thing in front of the teacher and she's trying to find out who's stolen from a handbag and the principal comes in and he says the whole class has stolen, the whole class has lied, the whole class has taken some of the stuff from the teacher's handbag.

You'd be... But the effect of all this is that they have been made liable to destruction and they are only as strong as their weakest link and their weakest link is Achan and he has brought repercussions for the whole body and so there is crisis for the whole nation.

Now let me tell you, when I read some of the commentaries about this passage in preparation, they do all sorts of contrary things.

[12 : 50] One of the things they say is, oh well this time Joshua didn't pray to God properly with the leaders, they're a bit too self-consistent, they only took out 3,000 men, they should have taken a lot more, they didn't seek his...

So the commentator would be saying to me tonight that I should be preaching a message to you about being more reliant on God and relying on his empowering and have made sure I prayed enough before I did it.

I don't think that's what it's about. And one of the other commentators very helpfully said, but you could actually look at this another way and say something huge has gone on amongst the people of God and by his grace only 36 people died.

He could have been a lot more severe on the nation. So take your pick and I'd say choose neither. But God doesn't just explain the problem, he tells Joshua the solution.

And the solution is terrible. Sin needs to be removed from among them and the offender must be destroyed. God meant what he said in chapter 6 when he said keep away, verse 18, keep away from the devoted things so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them.

[14 : 03] And that's what happens the next day. The whole nation presents themselves before God. We're not told how the selection occurs. Did they draw a lot? Who knows? But Judah's chosen from the tribes, the Zerahites from the clans, the Zimri from the families.

They're narrowing it down and finally Achan from the men of Zimri. And Joshua just looks him in the eye and says, fess up, give glory to God, tell the truth and he does.

Full confession. Verse 20, it's true, I've sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I've done. When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver, a wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them.

I coveted them and I took them. And they are hidden in the ground inside my tent with the silver underneath. Those 36 men who died last night died because of me.

I coveted them. I took these things. And Joshua sends people to check it out.

[15:14] And then they take him and they take his family and they take his animals and they stone them to death and they burn their corpses in the dust. And Joshua doesn't argue with God.

He takes him at his word. He does what he commands. It's shocking. It's particularly hard for us, I think, because Achan does a good thing when he's confronted. He confesses.

He owns his behaviour. And then he dies. And there's no national soul searching over applying the death penalty.

They do what God tells them to do. And it must have struck fear into the hearts of everyone in Israel. God is to be honoured.

He is the Lord God Almighty and when he says something, he means it. And clearly that may raise all sorts of moral issues for us, like how is it fair to kill Achan's family for what his dad, their dad, did?

[16:23] And I come to a passage like this and in the end, I don't think I can answer a question like that, even though I've raised it, except that everything that happens here happens at the absolute command of the Lord.

And this is his word and these are his orders. But the consequences are wonderfully dramatic. Verse 26, very last verse, the Lord turned from his fierce anger. The Lord turned from his fierce anger.

The chapter began with God burning with anger and it finishes with him turning from that same anger. Relationship is restored and peace is re-established. And I think if I stop my message here, we would be left with a picture of a holy God who will not tolerate one single offence against his words and commands.

Achan and his family died for his sin. The severity of God would leave us in a relationship of absolute fear.

[17:44] We would spend our lives living in fear. We would, it's almost like we would be waiting for God to pounce and blot me out with every single failure and offence. I could not feel secure in this world and in this life.

And we would end up in a relationship where we fear, of fear, where we link, we're always linking our behaviour to our performance, to our acceptance of God and we can never, ever, ever, ever be good enough for him.

But he's made a better way. He's made a better way. This is a story about the deserved anger of God being satisfied and turned away.

Atonement is made for this offence against God. God was angry. He was ready to be divorced from his people.

He had one foot out the door, bags packed, and his people responded to his word and Achan died for his sin and God turned from his anger.

[18:54] The divorce was off, relationship was restored and his anger was atoned for. Friends, God is rightly offended by sin.

He takes it personally. We ignore him, we run our own lives, we make our own decisions, we behave as though he doesn't exist. Don't think that doesn't matter to him, it does.

We place ourselves under his justifiable anger, we put ourselves in a very precarious predicament. We don't think it, but in God's economy, we deserve death.

From God's point of view, that's our default condition for our rebellion against him. And yet some of us, and me included, are just as greedy as Achan.

We'll put a bit aside for a rainy day, we'll stumble. He stumbled on some cool loot that fell off the back of a truck and thought nobody had noticed, easy money. There wasn't a living soul left in Jericho who needed it anymore.

[20 : 07] He didn't think that he would be seen and yet God knew his offence was against God and not against the people of Jericho. And Achan, gave his life for his offence.

And God's anger wasn't satisfied until the offence had been paid for. Our offences are against God. Something needs to happen to turn his deserved anger and attention away from us. Romans 3 speaks about our sin and Jesus when it says God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

And he did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. And he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

God presented Jesus as an atonement through faith in his blood. When you come to the person of Jesus Christ you find that God takes personal action to turn his deserved anger from us.

[21 : 20] God has acted to turn away his anger. We couldn't do it but God did. And this is huge and it means I can stand here tonight and I can say it to me but I can say it to you that if your heart tonight accuses you of anything or if there's another person who holds an offence against you or perhaps there's things in your life that really only God knows about I want you to hear that God has acted in Christ to forgive them and he is able to in Christ to turn away from any anger he might have towards you because of them.

Achan didn't do anything much worse than things that we do all the time and then he did he confessed his sin when he was confronted by God and he died he had to face the music and pay the penalty for his own sin and his life in a way became the answer to his own sin he was the atonement that his sin required his death turned God away from his burning anger and I think it's fantastic that I can stand here tonight and I can tell you it's something that's lived out in my own life sometimes when I go into a hole and I've gone into behaviours that I deeply regret or I don't want to be part of my life and I want to be at peace with God again I do not get back into relationship with him by beating myself up even though I sometimes do beat myself up I cannot self-atone but we come before a holy

God and we confess our sins because he has already made it safe for us to do that our confession doesn't save us Christ himself has stood in our place and died for our sins to make us safe he saves us and so God himself takes the most drastic action to make it safe for us to come near him he makes atonement for his own anger he acts to turn his deserved anger away and do you know why it's really simple it's because he loves us and you see that in 1 John chapter 2 he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world and in 1 John chapter 4 Lord this is love not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins what an extraordinary

God who loves us who allows us to live who has turned his deserved anger his fury he has taken it upon himself and he has turned it away from us I've said all day when you go from here to night I hope that you go with a really big smile on your face and a really big smile on your heart because of how great Christ's love for us is and I also hope that you go from here knowing it's a very healthy thing to fear and to respect Christ for who he really is Amen