

16 Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken. **17** The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken. **18** Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. **19** Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.” **20** Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: **21** When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.” **22** So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. **23** They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.

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, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. **25** 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. **26** Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

Digging Up Sin Is a Difficult Thing

I. Sin is More than Personal

One of the first things that strikes me when I read this story is how God considered the Israelites as a unit. When one sinned, God held the whole group accountable, even though the whole group had no way of knowing what had happened. First of all, God had about thirty men die in battle. Then God revealed to Joshua why they died and why the Israelites were routed when they fought the city of Ai. Someone had been unfaithful to Him by taking some of the items of Jericho that were supposed to be destroyed. Now, God could have just had Achan have a heart attack right on the spot when he was going to take the robe and the gold and the silver, but He didn't. Why not? He wanted the whole Israelite community to take notice of what happens when you break the law. He also wanted them to take responsibility for one another's actions.

When you are part of a family, you are supposed to look out after each other. That's one of the blessings of having brothers and sisters. Big brothers are supposed to protect their sisters, and sisters can help to refine their brothers. That's a part of what family is for and what big brothers are for!

When you join a congregation, you are vowing to be faithful to that community. It brings responsibility with it. If these are my brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are both on the same pathway to heaven, then we need to look after each other and pray for each other and fight temptation together. This is meant to be a big family here, an extension of your regular family. The strong need to help the weak. We need to care for each other. If we don't they are very susceptible to fall quickly from the faith.

I think back to the Garden of Eden. A part of Satan's tactic was to address Eve ONLY, even though Adam was right there as well. It is Satan's design to split up the family, to turn us against each other instead of fighting FOR one another. If your spouse is spending money foolishly, then you should say something to him or her. Children sense weakness. When one parent is weak, it can hurt the family when he or she is used as leverage for sin. The problem with our churches and our families is that we don't make the effort. Yes, don't be nosy. Don't snoop. But don't put your head in the sand either. If it's happening in your family or your church, then it is your problem. Speak up and condemn it. Don't be so afraid of the backlash. If you need help, then get it.

When one man and his family disobeyed, the Word says that God wasn't just angry but that He was "**fiercely angry**" from the Hebrew "haron" - which implies getting hot and red faced. If there were consequences for Israel when they didn't even KNOW what happened, then there also might be consequences that God lands on you as well, especially when you knowingly ALLOW sin to happen within your family or your church. Might we also apply this to us as a country when we allow abortion, adultery, slander, and other sins to carry on without saying a word to defend those who need to be defended?

II. Sin has a Way of Being Exposed

Achan probably thought to himself, "Nobody is going to know the difference. Nobody is going to get hurt. I'm just trying to look after my family. I wouldn't doubt if other Israelites are doing the same thing. It's such a waste to burn such beautiful items and just let this money go to waste." He wanted the beautiful robe. He wanted the silver and gold, so he found a way to take them. That's the way the sinful nature works. He found an excuse to make it ok. He condoned his actions, and he must have convinced his family that what he did was ok too. So they all slept in a tent that was built on stolen money, and they thought they got away with it.

It didn't take long for the truth to be exposed: only four rounds. First the tribes, then the clans, then the families, then the individual men. Imagine the sweat running down Achan's forehead as each round brought him closer and closer to being exposed. But he held out until the very end in blind hope that somehow his sins wouldn't be exposed. Was it greed? Was it fear? Was it unbelief? I don't know. But whatever it was, it didn't work, and there was no excuse for it.

It was so interesting to me when I recently listened to a book called Hillbilly Elegy, how families will go through great lengths to cover up the truth. One young man's grandma and grandpa had a terribly dysfunctional relationship. He was a drunk and she was an angry woman. They both went to church. But rule # 1 was that NOBODY would know their business and even they wouldn't really talk about it. Grandma and grandpa did everything they could to cover for their addicted daughter, even when they had to see their own grandchildren go through hell. But their church knew nothing about it. They never went to counseling. They just wallowed in their misery. I wonder how many people in our own congregation are living in the same type of misery, passing sins upon sins to their children and grandchildren, all because they are too ashamed to confess their sins. Ironically, the grandson wrote a book all about it, and now lots of people have seen the truth.

When you try to keep sins buried, it's like throwing rotten chicken in the garbage and not taking it out. Even though you can't see it, every time you walk by the garbage can you can't help but smell it, and it only gets worse over time. That's what sin does. Sooner or later, it has to be exposed and taken out. If it's not, the whole house will have to be evacuated. Hebrews 4:13 says, "**Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's**

sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Either expose it now while you still can or be exposed on Judgment Day.

III. God Loves Honest Sinners

It may not seem like it, but it was a loving thing that God exposed Achan's sin for all of Israel to see. All of the Israelites could see that you can't get away with anything in God's sight. If you think that keeping silent will help you, it won't. When you have a conscience that is sharpened by God's word, those sins will eat at you from the inside out. I've heard more than one deathbed confession from people who held sins in their whole lives, only to finally confess them as they are dying. It felt good for them to confess their sins.

Why? Well, listen to what Joshua says to Achan. **“My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”** Think of all of the ways that he could have addressed Achan. “Come on, you crook - tell me the truth! What have you done to us, you miserable thief!” But Joshua lovingly speaks to Achan. He says to him, “My son.” He doesn't treat him as an enemy. He treats him as a child who has been caught doing something he knew was wrong. God is a God of truth. We glorify Him when we tell the truth about ourselves, even when it is ugly.

Think about what our epistle lesson for today says - right after God says that nothing can be hidden from God in Hebrews 4:13, we have Hebrews 4:15-16, **“we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** Sometimes when people come in to talk about their problems they are obviously embarrassed and say, “You probably think less of me now.” You might be especially embarrassed because you were supposed to be the strong one. Don't forget, Jesus knows what it's like to be weak. He didn't eat or drink anything for 40 days. It made Him naturally weak and hungry with His human body. If you've ever had to give up a favorite food due to a medical condition - you know how hard that can be! You smell that hamburger or see that beer and you oh so wish you could have just one bite or one drink! God placed Him in the desert and didn't provide Him with anything to eat. Had He performed a miracle, it would have been for self serving reasons, and Jesus was the farthest thing from selfish. Jesus knew that wasn't the right way to use His powers. So He resisted, even though He was getting weaker and weaker and His stomach wanted food. This is in some ways the essence of temptation - having the desire to do something - but being forbidden from doing it. Jesus knows what it's like to be weak. So why do we feel so embarrassed about confessing our sins to Him? He already knows, and He wants to help.

Finally Achan came through with a specific confession. He didn't make excuses for his sin. He confessed exactly what he did and exactly why he did it. He didn't blame God for giving such a difficult law. He just confessed his sins, and God was glorified through the truth. Achan admitted he was wrong, and God was right.

What help was it for Achan though? He and his whole family and all he owned ended up being stoned to death and burned. It was as if there was no mercy for them at all. But there is one little word that might give us hope. **Joshua said, “Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today.”** The one little word is “today.” If I have trouble for one day, and not eternity, well then maybe there is hope for me. Perhaps that word is showing that the consequence of his sin is only a temporary and quick punishment: a

quick death but not an eternal death. We think of what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:8-9, **“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** This is the Word of God. We have no reason to doubt that the same truth applied to Achan and his family as well.

Achan’s sin and their death served as a warning for the Israelites to come. Take warning and take note. God has a fierce anger that is not to be trifled with. He wants us to deal with sin among each other. He wants us to repent. But hidden behind all of this wrath, He also wants to call us His children and treat us as His sons. He wants to give us an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

It got me to thinking, if God held the whole clan partly responsible for one man’s sin, then how about the opposite? Could God then regard the whole clan, and the whole world, as innocent for one man’s righteousness? What if the whole tribe was guilty, but one man never fell for the temptations of greed? What if the whole world had skeletons in their closets, but one man never had any sins to hide? What if that one man also happened to be God, who came to take away the sins of the world? Instead of being afraid of being associated with that one Man, we would want to be associated with Him and we would want Him to be associated with us. We would want to be bathed in Him. We would want to eat Him and drink Him. We would cheer His victories as if they were our own. We would want to be connected with Him in every way. We would celebrate Lent and we would sing all about Him.

Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle;
sing the ending of the fray.
Now above the cross, the trophy,
sound the loud triumphant lay:
tell how Christ, the world's Redeemer,
as a victim won the day. Amen.