



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Valley of Trouble

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Joshua 7:1-5, Part 1

Clint Pressley

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.

²Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. ³And 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." ⁴So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, ⁵and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

(Pastor prays)

In 312 AD, the Roman general Constantine faced his toughest battle to date. At the time, Christianity was illegal in Rome. On the evening of the battle, it is said that Constantine saw a vision and heard a voice. The vision was a blazing cross in the sky and the voice said, "In this sign, conquer." He immediately had crosses painted on all the soldiers' shields and the next day his army routed his enemy there at the famous battle of Milvian Bridge. Constantine became the emperor and immediately he legalized Christianity with what is known as the Edict of Milan, and some say that was the most important battle in Christian history.

Here in our story we've just come off a battle that's even greater. In the long history of God's people, has there ever been a military campaign that was more dependent on the Lord and His supernatural intervention? Read the story in Chapter 6 and watch God give a monumental victory to Israel in the taking of Jericho. And Chapter 6 ends in such a high note in verse 27. *So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.* But we find out in Chapter 7:1 that the positive state of affairs is quickly shattered by sin.

Isn't that how it goes? Everything can be going so well. You can be sitting on the beautiful beach of peace, and one sin— either yours or someone else's— causes a tsunami of pain that seems to wreck everything. Now this chapter nor this sermon are for the faint of heart. But if we look hard and think deeply about sin and its effects, I think we can be warned by God's wrath and then encouraged by God's grace. What I'd like to do is to walk slowly through the first part of this story and then come back and give a few points of application about sin. And then, share the Gospel. Let's go to the story.

Let's read Joshua 6:27-7:5. ²⁷ *So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.*

7 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. ² Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. ³ 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." ⁴ So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, ⁵ and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

"And the hearts of the people melted and became as water." In just six verses, sin has changed everything. For those of you who are flirting with something or thinking about something or even in the middle of something, I want you to hear...

Sin Ruins Us and Our Families

Let's go back and pick up and think about what we can learn here.

Sin stains our previous victories

What a great day and what a great victory Chapter 6 ends with. God gave the command; the people were obedient and God delivered them miraculously. And that entire celebration comes crashing down with that one word. BUT. That word changes everything. For example, it's a nice car BUT it doesn't have an engine. She's a pretty girl BUT she's an axe murderer. He's a great guy BUT he can't keep a job and hates his mother. This is not *But God*, which is always good. This is not *But if not* from Daniel. This is just *BUT*, and that right there wipes away from memory all the previous good up to that point.

One of my favorite living preachers and maybe the best preacher Baptists ever had has gone down in infamy because of the BUT. He is a great preacher BUT he had an affair. I would just offer this up as a warning: All the talent and success and charm and charisma in the world can never replace a striving for holiness and can never compensate for a rebellious life. Sin stains our previous victories.

Sin makes us practical atheists

The way the sin of Achan is described in verse 1 is that they *broke faith*. That phrase is used in the Old Testament to describe two things: idolatry against God and adultery against a mate. It's the betrayal of trust in pursuit of some other object of affection. It's loving something or someone more than you actually love God. And in addition to that, notice how the expedition is described in verse 2-4. ²Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. ³And 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." ⁴So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai,

You see, they did things they had done before but the presence or even mention of God is strangely absent in the narrative. He sent the spies just like he did before and they gave an optimistic report. If you go back to Chapter 2 when Joshua sent the spies to Jericho, the spies had confidence, not in their own ability, but their confidence was in the Lord providing the

victory. In Chapter 7, God doesn't even get an honorable mention. Pride and presumption had them operating as if God didn't exist. It's what our sin does to us. It blinds our eyes and stops our ears but opens wide our mouths. How much of your everyday life is lived in the awareness of God? How much do you think of God and thank God and consider the cross of Jesus and the grace of forgiveness? If you're not careful, sin can become a sealant that keeps you from the living water that is Christ. Sins stains previous victories. Sin makes us practical atheists.

Sin can create lasting shame

There is something strange in verse 1. When we are introduced to Achan, his name means "trouble," and that's how he is identified every other time he's mentioned in the Bible. But notice the genealogy. No other person we meet in the book of Joshua had four generations of family mentioned. Achan's sin puts shame on the family name. Notice in verse 1 the mention of Israel. One man, Achan, sinned and it affected an entire people. We never sin just to ourselves. It always affects and damages other people. These are things you need to consider when you are tempted. I think I heard John Piper say we should consider the effects. We should take mental steps down the road to when the sin ends. Is there a sobbing wife, a lost job, hurt family, embarrassment, broken friendships? Consequences that are completely unintended. You see, Satan hides the consequences. How many times have I heard a person that is caught in sin say, I never meant to hurt anyone. Sin always has unintended consequences.

Sin strips us of moral confidence

Let's move forward to verse 5 and look at the people. *⁵and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.*

"The hearts of the people melted and became like water." That's how Rahab described the people of Jericho in Chapter 2:11. It was because they were afraid of the people of Israel. And in Chapter 5:1, that's how the kings of the Amorites and Canaanites felt when they heard about God and God's people, Israel. Now the shoe is on the other foot because of sin. The Israelites ended up feeling just like a bunch of Canaanites. They were claiming to be Israelites but living like Canaanites and now with no moral ground to stand on. I think this is a big reason many of us don't confront a brother or sister in sin. It's because we have so much of our own. We often quote Jesus in Matthew 7 to take that log out of your own eye before you speak. By all means,

take the log out so you CAN speak. Unconfessed sin strips us of moral confidence but I think worst of all is that...

Sin condemns us

Go back with me to verse 1 and read that last phrase. *And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.* What a terrible thing to be on the receiving end of God's unmitigated anger! It's not just in the Old Testament. Hebrews 12:29 says our God is a consuming fire. This passage is echoed in the haunting chapter of Romans 1:18, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* This is a terrible way to end in the valley of trouble. Sin ruins us and our families. Sin stains previous victories. Sin makes us practical atheists. Sin creates lasting shame. Sin strips us of our moral confidence. But worst of all, sin condemns us before God. But that's not the end of the story is it? Romans 8:1 says, *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

How do you get into Christ Jesus? You ready for the Gospel. Here comes the Gospel. It's like this:

God is the holy and good creator who created everything and everyone; all of you. We all have dignity because we are created in the image of God. That image of God in us has, however, been disfigured by our sin. Sin crept in with Adam and Eve at the Fall and ever since then, we are born with a sinful nature and then we actually commit sin. That sin is such that it separates us from God. What it does is that it makes the Lord angry. That's a problem. That means we can't know God, can't be close to God, can't depend on God. We are actually the enemies of God. But God being all love has given us His son, Jesus. Here comes Christianity. Jesus, who was all God and all man, lived a perfect life on earth. That's an important part of the Gospel. He earned righteousness, kept the Law of God, in our place. And the great transaction happens at the cross of Jesus where He takes the wrath of God for our sins and gives us God's forgiveness because of His righteousness when you turn from your sin and believe. You see, sin condemns us before God and the Gospel saves us to God.

Sin stains previous victories but the cross removes those stains. Sin makes us practical atheists but the cross restores our faith, heals our souls and makes us able to face what we have to. Sin

creates shame but the cross of Jesus takes every bit of that away. Sin strips us of our moral confidence,. We walk around thinking who am I to say anything. And the cross gives us the righteousness of Christ. Sin condemns and the cross says there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

(Pastor prays)