

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 12-17-17

December 17 we will study Joshua 7. Discussion questions are:

1. How would you describe the feelings of the people of Israel when the walls of Jericho fell?
2. How would you describe their feelings after the defeat at Ai?
3. How do you understand Joshua's reaction to the loss?
4. Why would Achan disobey as explicit a command as 6:18-19?
5. Analyze Achan's 4-part description of the act of sinning (I saw, I coveted, I took, I hid).
 - a. What is the value of understanding the process of sin?
 - b. Look at Jesus' comments about murder and adultery in Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28.
 - i. How does Achan's 4-step process evidence itself with the sins of adultery and murder?
6. How important to the ministries of a church in its ministries is the purity of the body?
 - a. How does the story of Ananias and Sapphira illustrate this principle? (Acts 5)
7. How have you observed either of the following principles either in a Bible event or in your own life:

"Don't overestimate the strength of your enemy if God is with you."
"Don't underestimate the enemy if God is not with you."
8. What do you learn from 7:6-13 about when to pray and when to take action?
9. Agree/disagree: *"We don't need to expect God to come and get on our side and win our battles; rather we need to make sure we are on the Lord's side fighting alongside him to win His battles."*
10. What does *"Be sure your sin will find you out."* (Numbers 32:23) mean?
 - a. Have you seen this happen?
11. Agree/disagree: *"God takes sin more seriously than we do."*
 - a. On what do you base your answer?
12. Why did Israel stone Achan's family?
13. How do you understand this statement: *"If you uncover your sin God will cover it. But if you cover your sin God will uncover it."?*

Sermon: The Man Who Got What He Deserved

Joshua 7

He had celebrated every one of his 40 birthdays on a sand dune in the desert. He had never slept in a house with a floor under his feet. Every day of his life had been filled with the same monotonous journey to nowhere as he and a million other folks followed Moses through the wilderness. He went to the funerals of every one of his relatives who had come out of Egypt. He wore the same pair of sandals for the better part of 40 years. After 40 years he longed for a new pair. He ate the same food at every meal for 40 years

– manna. The one thing he never asked his mother was, “What’s for supper?” He knew the answer, “manna”. Night after night he longed for the day he would get what he deserved.

He heard the stories of the promises made to his family. Stories of receiving a land so rich it flowed with milk and honey. He was ready for his piece of the Promised Land. He dreamed of riches, of owning his own land, of sitting at his own table in his own house, of having many children each of whom was dressed in the finest clothing. He fantasized of banquet type meals served to his family and friends while he sat at the head of the table – the place of honor for a rich man. He longed to be the richest man in his neighborhood, looked up to by all. He wanted to get what he deserved.

Now his time had come. The day his father had told him about. His 40-year-old sandals had crossed the dry bed of the flooding Jordan River. His worn but not worn out sandals had marched around Jericho 13 times. Now his ancient sandals carried his racing body across the fallen stones of Jericho’s wall and into the waiting wealth of a totally destroyed enemy. Riches were everywhere, just for the taking. It was about time Achan got what he deserved.

Oh, he heard Joshua repeat the Lord’s warning about not taking any of the devoted things out of Jericho. He knew that all the gold and silver and bronze and iron was to go into the treasury of the Lord. But this was his inheritance. He had been poor long enough. He was ready for a new pair of sandals! When he saw the gold and silver and a robe so spectacular it would make Joseph jealous, he looked over his shoulder and was relieved to see that no one was watching. Quickly he stuffed the treasures into his pack and rejoined the people to help gather up treasures for the treasury of the Lord. Most of that day he joined with others in tossing all kinds of gold and silver into the carts to be transported to the treasury of the Lord. He went home that night, dug a hole and buried his advanced payment on his inheritance. He felt little remorse because in his opinion he had only gotten what he deserved.

Ai should have been a piece of cake for the Armies of Israel. The little village was such a pushover Joshua sent only 3,000 men to conquer it. When 2,964 of those men came home in defeat, mourning the loss of their 36 comrades, Joshua and the leaders of Israel were devastated and bewildered. They fell on their faces and blamed God. Much to their surprise God informed them the loss was not his fault but theirs because there was sin in the camp. Joshua was instructed to gather the entire nation and in dramatic fashion begin paring down the search for the guilty culprit by singling out one tribe, then one clan, then one family, then one household. The prideful and stubborn Achan does not step forward and confess his guilt until Joshua calls him by name. When he finally does own his guilt he gives an extremely useful definition of the process of sin. Achan enumerates each of the 4 steps of the process of sin as he says, “I saw, I coveted, I took, I hid.” Wise is the man who understands the point at which opportunity becomes sin. It was not a sin for Achan to see the gold, silver, and the robe. Seeing becomes sin at the point of covetousness. Coveting inevitably leads to the overt act of sinning, which in Achan’s

case was literally picking up the devoted objects and then hiding them. In your life and mine, victory over sin happens when we do battle with our covetous tendencies.

Jesus taught us clearly that the overt act of sinning always starts in a covetous heart. Remember in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, "You have heard it said... *'Do not murder' ...But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to the judgment....*" The overt act of murder begins with coveting anger in your heart. Remember when he said, "You have heard it said... *'Do not commit adultery' ...But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" The overt act of adultery begins with coveting lustful thoughts in your heart.

When Bear Bryant was the coach at Texas A&M they had a game with Arkansas. It was late in the game and A&M was winning. They had the ball close to the goal line but they weren't trying to score. They were just trying to run out the clock. The first string quarterback got hurt. The second string quarterback got hurt. Bear Bryant turned to the third string quarterback, a young man named Ronny Osborn, who had never played in a game yet. Bear Bryant said, "I'm going to put you in the game and whatever you do, don't you dare throw that ball. You just hand that ball off and we are going to run out the clock and win this game." Ronny went in and when the ball was snapped the play fell apart and he found himself scrambling for his life as he was chased by some huge, angry defensive linemen. He looked in the end zone and there was John David Crow, Heisman trophy winner from A&M, waving his arms in the air, calling for the ball. Ronny forgot everything Coach Bryant said and threw that ball to John David Crow for a sure touchdown. But at the last second a safety from Arkansas who was a world class sprinter on the track team stepped in front of the receiver, caught the ball and took off down the sideline with blazing speed where there was nothing but open field between him and the end zone. Ronny, who was third string quarterback because he was such a slow runner, turned around and chased this world class sprinter, caught him from behind at the 50 yard line, tackled him, saved the game and A&M won. After the game the Arkansas coach asked Bear Bryant, "How could your slow quarterback catch my star player?" Bear replied, "Because your man was running for a touchdown but my man was running for his life."

One of the reasons Bear Bryant was a great coach was because defeat was never acceptable to him. He expected to win every game. The powerful message of Joshua 7 is that God's people can never be content with defeat. When defeat comes to us we have to do serious self-examination. This great text teaches us that God will not grant victory at the expense of purity. Chapter 6 ended with the great victory over Jericho. Then the first word of chapter 7 is "But". What follows is the sad account of Israel's first and only defeat in the land of Canaan.

In Africa there is a pest called the white ant. If they invade your house you won't know it until it's too late and your house crashes. When white ants infest a house they eat the inside of the timbers. The outside looks strong but if you press your finger against it, your finger will go all the way through the board. Many a church has looked strong from

the outside - impressive buildings, large crowds, big contributions - but within the congregation there was a spiritual disease slowly eating away. All of a sudden the church collapses and people in the community are shocked. What in the world happened? We thought they were setting the mark for all other churches to follow. What happened was something was wrong on the inside, something not visible.

AN IMPURE ARMY MAKES AN EASY TARGET FOR SATAN'S ASSAULTS.

Ephesians 6 describes the strong church as one wearing the belt of righteousness. That doesn't refer to the imputed righteousness of Christ which God blesses us with. It refers to the practical righteousness we choose to practice when we choose to do what is right rather than what is wrong.

When Israel returns from Ai in defeat it is a new experience for them. They have never retreated before. It's interesting that the description of the battle of Ai doesn't indicate they prayed before going into battle or inquired of the Lord as to His will. They may have been suffering somewhat from spiritual pride. Forty years earlier their fathers overestimated the strength of the Canaanites and failed to move into Canaan. Now Israel does the opposite and underestimates the strength of the Canaanites. Here's the principle - Don't overestimate the strength of your enemy if God is with you and don't underestimate the enemy if God is not with you. If God is not with you the enemy can easily route the people of God. The defeat of Israel was not due to the strength of Ai, it was due to the weakness of Israel. God will not grant victory to an impure people.

"Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?" (Joshua 7:6-9) I believe with all my heart that we need to pray about the Lord's work. I also believe there comes a time to say "amen" to the prayer and get up and go do what the Lord wants us to do. In vs. 10ff God says, *"Stand up, what are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned.... proceed to sanctify the people." (Joshua 7:10-13)*

Joshua is confused. He asks God why He wasn't with them at Ai when He was with them at Jericho. His question is, *"God why are you not on our side anymore?"* God's answer is, *"The problem is not that I don't want to be on your side, Joshua, it's that you don't want to be on my side."* Remember in chapter 5 when Joshua saw the commander of the Lord's army he asked, *"Are you on our side or their side?"* The answer was, *"Neither. I am the commander of the Lord's army."* The point is we don't need to expect God to come and get on our side and win our battles; rather we need to make sure we are on the

Lord's side fighting alongside him to win His battles. Do you get the feeling God expected Joshua to know what the problem was? He says, *"Stand up...Israel has sinned."* Joshua was the one who gave the strict orders *"...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 gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."* (6:18-19) After the defeat at Ai you'd think that would be the first place Joshua would look. Rather he was just totally bumfuzzled by their defeat. Why is it that when trouble comes into our lives we want to look everywhere but at ourselves. Your marriage not hitting on all 8 cylinders? It must be your spouse's fault. Things not going as you like at church? It must be in the leadership. Your child having problems at school? It must be the teacher's fault.

Long ago Moses warned Israel, *"Be sure your sin will find you out."* (Numbers 32:23) Look at how that pans out. The entire nation assembled. One tribe is selected. One clan is selected out of that tribe. One family is selected out of that clan. One household is selected out of that family. Why did God use such a dramatic method for revealing the person who committed the sin? Why not just tell Joshua, *"It's Achan. Deal with him."*? Don't you suppose God wanted to impress upon Israel the importance of obeying him? And do you suppose God might have also been giving Achan time to repent? When the great meeting occurs and Joshua starts paring down the nation by tribe and clan and family, etc., why doesn't Achan come forward? Do you suppose he was hoping someone else would get the blame? Do you suppose he thought he could hide in the crowd? He did confess but it was forced and it was late. The Bible says that when Jesus returns every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus as Lord. But that confession will be forced and late.

What is the story of Achan teaching us?

GOD TAKES SIN MORE SERIOUSLY THAN WE DO

God has the entire camp participate in the capital punishment of Achan. The text says, *"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. 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.* (Joshua 7:24-26) At the end of the day Achan got what he deserved. Sometimes the more a man gets what he wants the less he wants what he gets. Do you remember in the earliest days of the church God personally dealt with the sin of a man and his wife by ending their lives in a very public way? What is God saying in these cases of capital punishment? He is saying, "I am not going to ignore sin among my people!" The problem with the 21st century church is we have just sort of come to consensus that the church will do just fine as long as we keep sin at an acceptable level. Rick Atchley said, *"I've learned we would rather deal with the consequences of sin than to deal with sin."* We grieve over what sin does but we don't grieve over doing it. We would be incensed if there was grievous known sin in the

church and nobody would do anything about it, and well we should be incensed if that ever becomes the case. But what about your personal life? Is there sin in that camp? Is there sin in your life that no one here knows about? Have you gone to great lengths to cover it up?

Back in the 1970's there was a baron in France named Richard DeArce who had a pet lion cub that he raised in his house. One night when the lion was 2 years old he tried to get it to go to the room where it slept and the lion didn't want to go in. He tried to force the lion to go into the room and the lion attacked and clawed him to death in a matter of minutes. A lion isn't supposed to be a pet and you don't play with lions. Some of us have pet sins and we think we can keep our pet sin around the house and no one will know about it and we play with it. When you play with sin you are playing with fire. From time to time you worry a little about someone finding out about your sin. The Bible says that is the wrong thing to worry about. The Bible says, "*Be sure your sin will find you out.*" The problem isn't someone revealing your sin but your sin revealing who you really are.

What is the story of Achan teaching us?

GOD TAKES SIN MORE SERIOUSLY THAN WE DO

GOD JUDGES SIN MORE THOROUGHLY THAN WE EXPECT

The same Bible that says God is love also says God is a consuming fire. We see the consuming fire nature of God in the story of Achan. Repeatedly the Bible warns us, "*The soul that sins it shall die.*" and "*The wages of sin is death.*"

We see the thoroughness of God's judgment of sin in the defeat of Israel. Let me give you a very important Biblical principle: GOD CANNOT GIVE VICTORY TO MANY PEOPLE WHEN SIN IS PRESENT IN A FEW PEOPLE. One man's impurity robbed a whole nation of the holiness they were supposed to have before God. Has God changed? Is God any less concerned with sin than he was in the days of Joshua? Could the sin of one person in a church hold back the entire church?

Let me tell you a true story that happened to a fellow minister down in Texas. He had been encouraging the policeman husband of a lady in the church to visit services. Finally one Sunday morning he came. In the middle of church he stood up and walked out, angry. The minister went to see him to see what angered him so. He said, "*I thought I'd give you Christians one chance so I came to your worship service. When I saw those 2 boys serving communion in their nice sport coats and fancy ties I recognized them from the night before when I picked them up drunk out at the topless club.*" Because of the sin of those 2 young men a woman was denied a Christian husband, children were denied a Christian father, and the church was denied a victory that for many years she had prayed for.

How much does God hate sin? How thoroughly does God judge sin? Just look at the cross. When Jesus took the sins of the world on his own shoulders on the cross, God turned his face and the sky went pitch black because God cannot compromise his character and fellowship his own son while his son is contaminated with sin. God judges sin more thoroughly than we expect.

Here's the good news...

GOD COVERS SIN MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN YOU CAN

Your heart wasn't made to handle sin. You cannot come up with a plan to handle sin that will work. But God can. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:8-9) The Bible says if we confess our sins God has a cover.

In the camp of Israel there were 2 people. There was a former prostitute who is called in scripture a faithful woman. She acknowledged her sin and turned to God. There was a man in the camp who looked good and moral and upright and everyone respected him. But he covered up his sin. And God sent stones and fire. Achan got what he deserved.

If you uncover your sin God will cover it. But if you cover your sin God will uncover it. The choice is yours.

Remember that old scene at the beginning of Wide World of Sport where the skier crashes and becomes the personification of "the agony of defeat"? Do you know the rest of the story? He didn't fall off the ski jump by accident. He went off on purpose. He later explained the jump had become icy and he was going too fast and he saw that if he went off the jump as he normally did he would go past the landing area and land in a place that could have instantly killed him. So he made a hard, painful, embarrassing decision. He changed his course and crashed horribly but he saved his own life in so doing.

I ask you today to have the wisdom and courage to change course in mid air and let God cover your sin. If there is sin in your life that you have hidden from this church and you think you have hidden from God, it's time to uncover it and let the blood of Jesus cover it. That is the only way that you and your family and this church are going to be blessed.