

## **Sermon Text: Joshua 7:17-26**

*The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. <sup>18</sup> Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.*

*<sup>19</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>20</sup> Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: <sup>21</sup> When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylon, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”*

*<sup>22</sup> So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. <sup>23</sup> They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.*

*<sup>24</sup> Then Joshua, together with all 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. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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.*

## **Sermon Theme: Wanting What You Want**

When someone has fallen into sin we often try and figure out, “Why?” Why would he do something like that? What made her want to do it? Which is then often followed up with, “I just can’t believe they did it. Don’t they realize where they are headed; how they are wrong?” We know that sin is serious. We know that sin is in all of us and everywhere. But sin isn’t always given the credit that it deserves. It can hard for us to wrap our minds around how completely and totally sin corrupts the heart and mind. Sometimes we get a glimpse when a particular action shakes us to the core leaving us feeling vulnerable and devastated. But more often than not, we don’t see sin that way. Because sin is so prevalent, we can become numb to it. Sometimes sin doesn’t even look that bad and maybe even has a seemingly innocent reason behind it. Like it’s going to help you in some way in the long run, or it’s enjoyable at the time and the immediate consequences don’t seem that bad, or it’s easy enough to hide and get by with.

Take Achan for example. We see the consequences for his sin: he and his family are executed by having the community throw stones at them until they are dead. There is nothing quick and painless with this execution; this is personal, very bloody, and a violent way to die. So what goes through your mind when you see them so brutally executed, everything of theirs burned, and then a memorial set up to remind everyone what they did? Yes, we understand that stealing is serious. We know that we shouldn't do it. We know that it is wrong. But to be killed like that?

From Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, or Lutheran School, you may be familiar with the battle of Jericho. The Israelites marched around this fortified city and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of marching, the walls came tumbling down, and the Lord gave them the city. It was a great victory; an impressive win! But what maybe was glanced over or left out was what the Israelites were to do after the walls came down. Every living thing was to be destroyed by the sword. And everything else, their leader Joshua tells them: **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.<sup>19</sup> All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.” (Joshua 6:18-19)**

But Achan had a different idea. Maybe he didn't think anyone would notice. Maybe he thought it would be too wasteful. Maybe he didn't think that it was right that all of it should go to the Lord. He needed things too to take care of himself and his family; why should all go to the offering? One thing was sure, instead of doing what God wanted him to do, Achan did what he wanted to do.

So, fresh off a great victory, the Israelites are ready to continue on their conquest of the Promised Land. But at the next town they are defeated and chased back with their proverbial “tales between their legs.” The people are devastated; it was supposed to be another easy victory. They didn't even take their whole army with them! Joshua, their leader, tears his clothes in despair, falls face down and just can't believe that God would do this to them! But this is what happens because Israel had not been faithful; they broke their agreement with God. The Lord speaks to Joshua and plainly states it: **“Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions.<sup>12</sup> That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.” (Joshua 7:11-12)**

You have to imagine that Achan is getting a little nervous at this point. Obviously someone did notice. It's almost impressive how willing he is to wait it out as the lots are

being taken. But eventually he can hide no longer: “**Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the Son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.**”

How could Achan have done this? It wasn't just because of dumb luck that the lot fell to him. As is stated in verse 14 it is the Lord who is choosing the tribe, the family, the man. Did he really think he could get away with it? Something was pricking his conscience because he hid the stolen things in his tent and buried them in the ground. But still he doubles down on his play and wasn't going to come out admitting to the crime until the lot came down to him. Why would he do it? He had to have realized the consequences! We really don't know what was going through this man's mind. We aren't given his thought process and plan beyond the fact **he saw...coveted**—sinfully wanted something that was not his...**and took** (v. 21).

Maybe you sympathize with him; this is quite the tragic account of Achan and how even his family ends up becoming accessories to the crime and suffer the consequences for it. But maybe you almost feel bad but it's not just because of the tragic story but because you can relate to him. You know your own sin in your life. You know the temptation to do what you want and ignore God. You know how it is to try really hard to hide what you have done hoping no one finds out. You know what your sins deserve.

Maybe you have a different attitude. Achan had every chance to come forward and “clear his name.” But while we nod our heads in agreement that justice was served, be careful. That sinful-pride only needs a little bit to grab onto as it downplays the seriousness of your own sin and magnifies the sins of others. How willing we can be to admit that I am sinner, and quickly follow it up with, “But I wouldn't do something like *that*.” As if that makes you a good person—while ignoring the sin you are trying to bury is still very present.

And sometimes we resist sin! We don't have to try and hide it or believe any self-delusions; we fought and won! But even then that so often is because of a self-serving attitude—doing what I want. We didn't resist it because that sin was against God, but because I was afraid of the potential consequences to my reputation, it would make life more difficult, it would upset someone and you didn't want to have to deal with it. So we still went against God's will, did what we wanted.

So then I fall. Again. And the cycle begins. Again. Like Achan, I see what I want...I listen to the devil's lies and empty promises... I know what God says and know I shouldn't. But I still want it and after some extra convincing, reasoning and bargaining with myself, I take it. Then I have to try to hide it, and work overtime to try and bury the sin under excuses. I try to hide it by directing other's attention to other people's sins or blaming them for what I did. Even when I confess my sin, caught in something, all too often I admit to it simply in the hopes that the consequences won't be as bad or it will be ignored until next time. We treat it like another plea-bargain in the courtroom: I'll admit I am guilty in exchange for time off, leniency, or you leaving me alone.

Shows you what a powerful force sin is and it's potential for self-destruction. When Achan took the devoted things the Lord said that **he would no longer be with the Israelites**. This man's one sin affected the whole nation of Israel. When we sin it very seldom only affects me personally but hurts our relationships and our friends, families, and strangers. But not only are there consequences—albeit sometimes very unpleasant—that we face here on this earth. Far worse is what they do to our relationship with God. Sin separates us from God and his love. Continuing in a sinful action is able to push out faith from my heart and leave me excuseless and defenseless before the Lord who hates sin. God doesn't say try your best in this battle against sin and temptation, he says resist it. He doesn't say, as long as you try hard I'll be happy with you. He says be perfect. He doesn't say try; he says do. And because we don't, we deserve a far more violent death with eternal suffering in hell.

Where we are so utterly hopeless on our own, in the wilderness we see our hope. Jesus knows how cunning the devil is, he's heard his lies. He knows how convincing he can be, the devil quoted God's Word right at him. He sympathizes with our weaknesses not because he has sinned himself, but chose to live in weakness like us. He knows the great struggle, he wrestled with it in the wilderness. He was tempted in every way, just as we are, the letter to the Hebrews says, yet he was without sin. Every lie the devil shot at him, Jesus knocked down. Every cheap shot the devil took with temptation, Jesus perfectly defended. It wasn't for his own personal benefit, but it was for you. It wasn't for his own glory, but to glorify God, to worship and serve his will.

But what does that mean for my sin? As with Achan, God doesn't ignore it. Those sins aren't swept under the rug. God the Father isn't the grandpa with a long beard who pats us on the back when we have sinned telling us accidents happen. The Lord is just; punishment must be served. And it was served on your perfect Savior. He claimed your selfish heart his own, gives you his selfless sacrifice and a heart that desires to serve God's will. He became sin for you wearing your sinful pride on that cross and in its place he gives you his robe of perfection. Because of Achan's one sin, all Israel suffered. God removed his curse on Israel, turned from his anger after Achan's death in the Valley of Achor. Because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, all mankind was robbed of holiness and perfection. Because of Jesus' innocent death and perfect life God removed the curse of sin. Justice is served. Jesus' punishment brings you peace with God. Your sins have been removed from you; the debt they owed is paid in full. With his death on the cross, you have life. With his rising to life again, you have eternal life guaranteed.

It's that same Jesus who continues to fight by your side today. He comes to you in his Word to give you the tools you need to resist the devil, your sinful nature, and sin's temptations. He feeds you with his body and blood in the Lord's Supper to strengthen your faith, to give you forgiveness and healing in your continued battle. His Word and

Sacrament create and feed the right-living, for-the-right-reasons attitude that can only be the work of God within us.

Confess your sin in the assurance that your sins have been taken from you. Uncover the sin in your life and pour it out before the Lord because Jesus has already made you clean of sin with his blood. Fight the good fight of faith wanting what God wants, following his will, and clinging to your victorious Savior and his promises. Amen.