

Achan's Idolatry
Joshua 7:1-26
Sermon Outline

Introduction: The story of Achan disturbs us for numerous reasons, not the least of which is that we discover there that God holds us deeply accountable. What are we to make of it, and how do we fit it into the message of free forgiveness that we find in the Christian faith?

I) God will find us out

A) The finding out of Achan

Disaster, sorting out, confession, evidence

What was hidden was fully exposed

Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5): *You have not lied to men but to God*

B) Why this vivid and frightening story?

1) Historical answer: "Deus contra mundum"

2) More personal answer: God wants us to be honest

- Achan was a liar: Coveting and burying
- Our secret sins

II) We will bear the consequences of what God discovers

A) The punishing of Achan

vv. 1, 26: the anger of the Lord burned

v. 25: The Lord brings trouble on you today

Matt. 10:28: Don't fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Hebrews 12:28: ...our God is a consuming fire

B) What are we to do with this troubling event?

Run from it

Let God speak: God takes us more seriously than we take ourselves

v. 19: My son, give glory to God...And let me know what you have done

Fathers and their children

What God alone knows

Summary: Uncomfortable yet elevating truth

III) How all this fits with the Christian story

A) To be graciously forgiven is not to be unaccountable

B) To be graciously forgiven comes at great cost to God

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Document the process by which Achan is found out. What does this teach about the justice of God?
- 2) Compare the story of Achan with the story of Ananias in Acts 5:1-11. How are they similar? God rarely exposes and punishes sin in so dramatic a fashion as he does in these two stories. Why does he do so in these cases?
- 3) Reflect on the following: “The deep story of the Bible, ever since Adam’s sin, has been ‘Deus contra mundum’ (God against the world). Church people are as apt to find themselves on the wrong side of God as is anybody else. What puts us with ‘the good guys’ isn’t that we show up at church more than some people. It is that we trust and obey God, as Achan evidently did not.”
- 4) What was Achan’s sin? See v. 1, vv. 20-21. What effect did his sin have on other people? What sorts of sins do people tend to hide from each other? Identify a couple of your secret sins and talk to God (and somebody else if you can) about them.
- 5) What happens to Achan after he makes his confession? Does this seem severe? Why does God’s anger ‘burn’ so hot about it? Why is it against Israel and not just Achan? Is that fair?
- 6) Reflect on the following: “Often our children recoil when we punish them. They think we hate them. But that is only because they cannot see what we see of the consequences of their behavior. Likewise God alone knows what we were made for and what life spent forever without him is like. And so, through stories like the story of Achan, God warns us, lest in the end we should find ourselves outside.”
- 7) The relentlessness with which God holds us accountable is troubling but it is also elevating. It reminds us that we are high and holy creatures made to love and be like a high and holy Creator. Spend some time in prayer asking God to make you more like him.
- 8) Imagine Jesus reading the story of Achan’s stoning, burning, and destruction and knowing that all of this was a grim and vivid picture of the ‘trouble’ that he had chosen to endure for us. Thank him for it.