

**“My people have sinned and broken my covenant.”**

**Joshua 7:11**

**“When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.”** (John 16:8)

Last week we looked at the story of Achan in Joshua Chapter 7. It came to me while I was speaking about it that this story is a powerful parable of what happens to a church and a nation if it allows unconfessed sin to take root in it. Since last week I have been studying and praying and I want to come back to Achan again and to look at it more deeply.

The story begins with a clear instruction from the Lord before the attack on Jericho -

**“But 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.”**

**“Otherwise.”**

Hidden in this verse is a warning of trouble ahead – “otherwise.”

Someone did not listen to the warning -

**Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord’s anger burned against Israel.**

Hidden in this is a development of what “otherwise” means. Here it is - **“The Lords anger burned against Israel.”** They had not listened to what he had said nor the very serious warning of the consequences of sinning against him. Now this terrible mistake is about to bear its fruit -

**Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, “Go up and spy out the region.” So the men went up and spied out Ai...So about three thousand went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them.**

Joshua was obeying the Lord’s command to take the land. The city of Ai was next in line and so the people went up to capture it. But disaster struck. The promise of God came to a standstill. The people of God were beaten. **The promise had failed**, and we can be sure that in Ai the Lord was being mocked. Worse - people have been killed in the defeat.

Joshua was very upset and confused. The Lord’s promise had led them over the Jordan and defeated Jericho. How could this have happened at Ai? Back comes the terrible answer -

**The Lord said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant.”**

The people have crossed over the limits of the covenant which the Lord had established with them. The people had a responsibility not just to obey the covenant promises but to stay within them.

### **Leviticus makes things clear**

What is being said here? The sin of Achan was not just a casual error which could be overlooked. The Lord calls it a “violation of my covenant.” Leviticus makes this quite clear –

### **IF**

“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land. I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid.” (Leviticus 26 :1-5)

### **BUT**

“But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.”

Achan’s sin had moved God’s people from “if” to “but.” The relationship between God and his people had been seriously damaged. This is what sin does. I made this clear last week -

### **What does sin do?**

**\* Sin destroys – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)**

The church cannot reflect the glory of God until it is convicted of its own sin and confesses. If there is unconfessed sin in the body, it breaks the relationship with God and the church begins to stray from the path the Lord has prepared for it. The fire of the Spirit burns low, faith is low, and the church loses its salt and its light. Much more seriously, the Spirit cannot work in such an environment. Nor can it fall in reviving fire unless the sin is dealt with.

**\* Sin separates - It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. (Isaiah 59:2.NLT)**

Sin separates God's people from his covering, his healing, and his direction. Many churches and many leaders have pressed ahead in the works of God while the spirit of God is far from them. Unconfessed sin separates the church from the close walk with God which is so necessary for its survival.

**\* Sin pollutes - Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. (Numbers 35:33)**

The spilling of innocent blood pollutes the land making it unholy. In the same way unconfessed sin pollutes the spiritual foundations of the church. The church becomes unholy, and a holy God cannot tolerate this.

### **National sin**

Achan's sin had national consequences. This still applies today and I see it in Ghana.

**The first great sin** which the church must face up to is that it has not cared for the nation and consequently the nation has gone its own way. The church went after comfort and ease, prosperity and success, and the nation has made this its goals. The central focus of the Lord, his cross and a passionate love for the nation he created has been lost. The size of this sin can only be understood when spiritual history is understood.

Africa protected the Lord when he was a baby. Africa protected the Lord from the violence of Herod and in the background Satan's desire to kill the child Jesus. Satan has been taking out his anger on Africa ever since for its protection of Jesus.

There is a deeper issue. Satan feared that one day the Lord would raise up a nation which would break him. He feared that day and tried to destroy Africa before it could happen.

That nation was Ghana. Ghana's destiny was to be a channel by which the spirit would flow into all West Africa, into wider Africa and into the world. The church in Ghana has not loved this nation or protected it. The destiny of Africa is in danger because of the laziness and failure of the church.

This will bring the judgement of God on Ghana. It is a sin he cannot overlook unless the church is convicted of its sin and confesses. This process has to begin with the leadership with the conviction of its own sinfulness both personal, within the church and within the nation. The only hope is revival.

If the great sin of the church was not to protect the nation, the second great sin was not being willing to bear the burden of the broken nation before the Lord. Caught up in success, achievement and pride but churches failed to bear the agony of the Lord for Ghana in its heart. Success driven Fiesta religion leaves no room for seeing the agony of the land and no willingness to take up such a burden. After all what success is there in bearing a bleeding broken child to the Lord - one that has been broken by the neglect of the ones that try to bear it.?

### **Sin has deep roots**

It's one thing for the church to proclaim "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." It's another thing to break the roots of that sin by bringing individuals and churches to a conviction of sin. That's because in the 21st century we have lost sight of what Leviticus teaches and of the danger of "otherwise." Joshua had the same problem.

**Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. 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. 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.**

**Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honour him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me." (Joshua 7:16-19)**

Achan did not yield easily to the urging of the Spirit to reflect on what he had done, to be convicted and to repent. Joshua had to bring him to that point by painful probing. I would say the same is true today in the 21st century church in the UK and Ghana. There is a very deep resistance to the call for conviction of sin. The reason is simple. The church is have gone after ways of comfort and ease where there is no room for any moral absolutes.

The Lord God is not changed over thousands of years. He loves his people and wants to lead us on. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. But there is a limit. He is pure and holy and cannot tolerate sin. He knows how badly it damages his people and so he has to deal with it in judgement. It is a very true theological principle that God judges out of love to restore. But he does judge, and he will judge. no amount of hiding from this truth will change it.

### **The cross**

**"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)**

Achan To pay a price for his sin and it was costly and painful. 36 others had already paid and now he must foot the final bill -

**Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them**

There is a high price to pay for cleansing the churches of their sin. By the grace of God we do not have to be stoned! The Lord has paid the price. We have to come to the cross, be convicted of our sin and ask for forgiveness. We – God's people, those were born again have to come and be convicted of our sin towards ourselves, the Lord and the nation. This is very costly and very difficult to do.

**Yet it is the path to the only salvation for the nation. A church convicted of its sin becomes a clean vessel into which the Lord can pour the power of the Holy Spirit in revival.**

In one revival a church was gathered, and the people were beginning to confess their sinfulness before the Lord. The convicting power of the spirit was at work then this happened, and an eyewitness wrote it down for us. "We heard in the distance the sound of horses running. The sound grew louder and louder as the horses seem to get closer and closer. It felt like they were at the door and then suddenly the power of the Holy Spirit burst on us and we were filled with a new power and a new freedom. We felt we could go out and change the world."

May it be so for us. Many of us are longing for it but until the sins of Achan are cleansed revival will not happen.