

Sin in the Camp

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Next two weeks we'll be out of the Ballet for SXSW. Next Sunday we encourage you to enjoy what the festival has to offer, but the following Sunday we'll have Neighborhood Church, which is a more informal gathering of City Lifers in your part of the city. Check online. This will be our last sermon for a couple weeks *so really pay attention*.

Israel

With the victory over Jericho in the rearview mirror, Israel presses on into God's promised land to take the Amorite city of Ai. They do the necessary reconnaissance, and the spies come back with an encouraging report. The city is small; the people are few. We only need a few thousand to take them. Next thing you know the three thousand warriors turn tail and flee back to camp. They've been routed by the Amorites. 36 dead. **And the hearts of the people melted and became as water**. Israel is terrified, confused. But why? They only lost 36. It is their first loss but still it's minimal. The defeat has a disproportionate impact because it's symbolic. God had promised, **"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you"** (1:3). And yet here they are running back to camp. Joshua captures their fear, **"For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth"** (7:9). It's not just the losses, or even the symbolic defeat; they jump to conclusions fearing the worst—we'll be surrounded, cut off. They've forgotten Jericho, the Jordan; they're no longer standing on the promises of God. Fear can be a sign we're no longer standing on the promises of God. Fear of kids, fear of finances. *There's something greater to fear*.

Joshua

We're told Joshua **"tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening"** (6) along with the elders, put dust on his head, and cried out to God. Looks pious and yet, in verse 10 God snaps at him, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?" So is this a good thing or a bad thing? He looks humbled, tearing clothes, identifying with dirt, praying and says, **"Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!"** (7) He's in despair, crying out, forecasting a dismal future. When you feel like this, God wants to hear it. There's no point in hiding our feelings from God. He can see them. Be authentic with him in prayer, talk plainly about your concerns, *but don't expect him to always agree with your feelings*. Part of prayer is allowing God to disagree with us. It's built right into the Lord's Prayer: your kingdom come (not mine), forgive us our sins. God loves us enough to correct us, *especially in prayer*. Sometimes we bottle up anger, pretend like it doesn't exist. But God sees it, so sometimes you'll hear people say, God wants to hear your anger. Tell him. Which is true. We often get angry when we feel like we've been treated unjustly. But what you don't hear is, allow God to correct you, to show you justice is in his hands, that you've made a god of injustice! Are you allowing God to disagree with you, in prayer? Seek him with a humble heart; invite the Spirit to search you, and call you out toward Christ.

Breaking Covenant

While praying Joshua is suddenly made aware why Israel was defeated. There's sin in the camp! In the words of verse 1, Israel has broken faith/covenant with God. There are three aspects to this sin: **communal**, individual, and theological. In verses 10-11 God says Israel has sinned, when in fact it was Achan who stole devoted things from Jericho. God repeatedly assigns Achan's sin with Israel saying, *they* transgressed, *they* took, *they* stole, lied, and therefore the people cannot stand. What's going on? Corporate personality, when one's identity is not determined purely by the self or individual but rather by the whole, by the corporate entity. We do this as Americans when we say, *We hold these truths self-evident: life, liberty, pursuit of happiness*. When I say it, I say it as part of a whole sharing same value. Liberty binds us together. Similarly, God sees Israel as a whole in relationship with him, bound together in covenant, and as a result sin takes a communal shape. One sins, we all sin. Why? Because we are not just individuals; we are the collective place God has chosen to place his name. Now, how does this affect the church since we're not Israel? Some of it carries over. Sin is communal. St. Paul says it like this, "*we are individually members of one another*" (12:5); *when one suffers we all suffer* (1 Cor 12:26); *in Adam all sinned* (Ro 5:12). He simultaneously affirms individuality and corporate personality. What does this look like **today**? Say it's been rough at work or at home, and you're stressed out. Can't sleep, can't get off mind. CG meeting is coming up but out of sinful *anxiety* you choose not to go. They will stress me more. Sinful anxiety prevents you from serving others and from others serving you. Super busy season. Sinful *busyness* you don't even see the dishes, the lawn, the pain in your friends text. Sunday worship look undesirable because you prefer to be productive, so you don't join the church to be edified and edify others. Sin is communal. This communal framework isn't here for you to judge others; it's here for Scripture to judge you. What we need to ask is how has *my* sin brought trouble on my community? Start by asking God in prayer. Second, sin is **individual**. While Israel is included in Achan's sin, it's Achan alone who's punished. God is so intent on individual responsibility he publically moves through Achan's social circles (tribe, clan, household) one at a time until he reaches Achan himself. You say why would God humiliate him like that? Achan could have prevented it if he'd just confessed, but instead he hid his sin. Don't hide your sin, bring it out. Don't linger in the darkness, bring it out into the light. His genealogy is traced back four generations to say *make no mistake, it's Achan who is responsible*. Then his family stoned with him? Probably because they are complicit in the sin. After all, the stolen items were hidden in the family tent. Isn't that severe? What was so awful about swiping a few items from the rubble of city? This brings us to the third, and most important aspect of sin, **theological**. The offence is described as *outrageous*. What's so outrageous? Well, it was a prohibition clearly given to all Israel when they went into Jericho: "*keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction* (6:18). It's not just that it was a divine prohibition, though that should be enough. It was taking *herem*, the things God said should be rendered useless. The city and all its belongings were to be purified from their association with the chaotic, false-god worshipping Canaanites. To sanitize the land for God's dwelling. Taking the *herem* was a flagrant contamination of God's dwelling place, and Achan brought it right into the camp, into his own tent! It's not just having an affair; it's having it in the marriage bed! He brings trouble into the camp. Who wants to be a

family member? Who wants to be on the other end of the affair. We're ready to call it sin when people get hurt. In our society, sins are outrageous only when they hurt someone, *not when they hurt God*. Our moral compass only reads east-west, not north-south, so outrage occurs only when *we* get hurt. But Scripture shows us the greater "harm" is north-south, sin is primarily *theological*: *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*, says David after sexual assault (Ps 51:4). Joshua insists Achan's sin is against God's glory and calls him to put things right, "*My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me* (19). Achan responds: *Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them*" (20–21). Truly I have sinned *against the Lord*. Do you see it? This is your greatest offense. Although he brought trouble on Israel, and it affected everyone, Achan knew his sin was *primarily against the Lord*. Is your compass stuck? Do you apologize to others, *but fail to apologize to the Lord*, to repair the damage done to the *truly* offended party? In words of Thomas Watson, till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet. And until we see sin as God sees it, primarily an offence to him, we will remain entangled in it, detracting from his glory, jeopardizing our faith as we repeat the offense over and over. How do we disentangle?

Achan

Punishment. Evil must be purged from the camp. God doesn't double standard: what applies to Jericho applies to Israel: *And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger* (25-26). Now this may seem cruel, stoning, but was the prescribed death when breaking covenant. And a reason for this was that no individual stone caused the death. No single person bears the guilt for the death. It's the *state*, corporate personality. But there's more than punishment. Notice Achan's body is also piled up with stones *after* he is dead. Also happens with the King of Ai (8:29). Why? Post-mortem desecration of the remains, crushing the body with a pile of rocks. It depicted denial of hope of resurrection. Instead you get divine curse. Dead *and* judged, crushed under the weight of God's holy anger. God-centered offence is resolved by God snuffing us out. And it's what we all deserve. Who hasn't taken devoted things into the heart, hidden sin, and brought it into the camp? Sin is individual and communal. But worse, it is theological: *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*. The alternative is God to repair the damage done, for the offended party to step in and suffer the death, bear the curse. Talk about injustice! But where's our anger now? See, Jesus was also double-stoned. Once for death, twice for judgment. He is nailed to the cross in bitter agony *and* suffered the curse. The sky grows dark, the ground shakes, he cries: My God, My God why have you forsaken me? It's not a cry of ignorance but a cry of innocence, of acknowledgement the Father has turned his back, as he bears our sins and our curse. But unlike Achan the rocks cannot hold Jesus down. Three days later he erupts in resurrection light, conquering sin, death, and hell. And this is how we disentangle. Allow Jesus pull us into his resurrection life, to put his holy presence in us, yielding to glory, to live north-south in holiness away from herem. We only need yield, agree, obey. When sin is bitter Christ will be sweet!