

Joshua 7

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[0:00] Hi there, my name is Andrew. If you've not met, I'm one of the elders in Harvest Church. Emma and I have been away for the last three Sundays. It's so good to be back.

However, we were in Portugal three Sundays ago with Vinnie and Diana. Two Sundays ago, it was our granddaughter's Thanksgiving service in our church in Chichester. And then last week, I was with our church in Westmore, bringing God's Word to them there.

And it's lovely to be back. I've been keeping up to date with listening to preaching online. And what a challenging series Joshua is proving to be. And I have to say, today, I think, is going to be another one of those days where the Word of God is, I'm expecting, is going to challenge us deeply.

I have to say, in preparing this, I've had to go quite on a journey myself. And I've found God speaking to me about some things which I've needed to address.

And so we're going to look at Joshua chapter 7 today. If you've got your Bible with you, we're looking at the whole of Joshua chapter 7, all 26 verses of it. It's the story of a man called Achan and what happens to him.

[1:11] And just a quick update before we read it. So Joshua is the count of God's people coming out, sorry, coming into the promised land, Canaan, under the leadership of Joshua, having previously been slaves of the Pharaoh in Egypt and then spent 40 years wandering in a wilderness before coming into this place of fruitfulness where they were promised so much.

And this is the story of how they start to take the land and inhabit the land and the lessons God teaches them in that process. And up until now, the people have done well.

Recently, or probably two weeks ago, I think it was, we looked at the story of Jericho. And a great success happens in Jericho. The people of God conquer this city.

I think it was more than two weeks ago, actually, but whichever. And so that's where we've got to. So let's read the scriptures together. They're on the screen, but you've got your Bible with you.

That's great. But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things.

Achan, son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burnt against Israel. Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-Avon, to the east of Bethel, and told them, go up and spy out the region.

[2:37] So the men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it.

Don't weary all the people. Only a few men are there. So about three thousand men went up. But they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them.

They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this, the hearts of the people melted and became like water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down 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, oh, sovereign Lord, Why did you ever bring these people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?

If only we'd been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan. Remember, that's in slavery. Oh, Lord, what can I say now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?

[3:47] 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?

There's a bit of emotional blackmail going on here. The Lord said to Joshua, stand up. What are you doing down on your face? 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. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They turn their backs and run because they've been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

Go. Consecrate the people. Tell them, consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. That which is devoted is among you, O Israel.

[4 : 52] You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it. In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the Lord takes shall come forward clan by clan.

The clan that the Lord takes shall come forward family by family. And the family that the Lord takes shall come forward man by man. He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire.

Along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel. So early the next morning, Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes and Judah was taken.

The clans of Judah came forward and he took the Zerrites. He had the clan of the Zerrites come forward by families and Zimri was taken. Joshua had his family come forward man by man.

And Achan, son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him the praise.

[6 : 07] Tell me what you have done. Do not hide it from me. Achan replied, It's true. I've sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel.

This is what I've done. When I saw the plunder, a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took them.

They're hidden in the ground inside my tent with the silver underneath. So Joshua sent messengers and they ran to the tent and there it was, hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord.

And 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'd stoned the rest, they burnt them.

[7 : 17] Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. And the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the valley of Achor ever since.

Oh God, help us with your word. Help us to meet you and through your word. Breathe your...

Holy Spirit, come and breathe on us. Draw us to our Father. Help us to see the glory of the Son. Risen, crucified Jesus, who's died for our sin and shame.

Give us a right horror of sin. Help us to live for your glory, Lord. Amen. Quite a challenging passage, isn't it?

So Israel's had great success at Jericho, which leaves the Canaanites in fear for their lives.

[8 : 35] That's what we read in chapter 6. Yet soon after they fail in trying to capture the next city, Ai. What's happening?

What's going on? Well, the story tells us, but I want to highlight a few things just from the story. The main thing which we find out later in the story is Achan's sin. But can I highlight a couple of other things first?

Unlike at Jericho, nobody appears to seek God as to whether they should attack Ai. Perhaps it's a leadership failure by Joshua.

We don't know. The Bible doesn't make it clear. Perhaps there's just a pride where we've conquered that, so we can just go on and do this stuff however we want to. And the spy's report never mentions God either.

And I just think it's important that we need to remember that when we are being successful, there is the greatest risk of taking our eyes off God and doing things in our own strength.

[9 : 42] If you then read on into chapter 8, once they've been humbled by what's happened with Achan, you'll see that they do it right again.

They seek God. But obviously the focus of this chapter is Achan, who I suppose charitably we could say maybe he forgot God's instructions, which are recorded in chapter 6, verse 18, probably more

likely decided to ignore God's warning.

What was that warning? Let's remind ourselves. 6.18 says this, But keep away from the devoted things. Keep away from the devoted things. And then don't even go near them, so that you not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them.

Wow. Even just going near them, you're going to be tempted to take them. That's what happened.

Otherwise, you'll make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it.

Wow. So there was a warning here. I don't think Achan forgot. I think he just saw these things and thought, Wow.

[11:02] While he's a wealthy man, we know he's a wealthy man because later on it tells us about his sons and daughters and his sheep and his cattle and everything else. He saw them and he decided, even though he knew they were devoted to other gods, and the result of this was going to be destruction, he decides to take them anyway.

In the passage we read, it refers to, this is a theft.

That's a sin. He lies too. Verse 11, it says both of these things. In doing so, he breaks covenant relationship with God, who can have nothing to do with sin.

They know that God is holy and can have nothing to do with sin and things devoted to other gods. I wonder what was going on in Achan's mind.

Maybe, we don't know. Maybe he thought, God won't know. We know he's holy, but surely he won't notice this. We don't know.

[12:15] But maybe, a little bit similar, we read about in Acts chapter 5, about Ananias and Sapphira, who choose to lie about the money which they've received from selling a field.

Not that there was anything wrong with that, but they choose to lie about how much they got and how much they gave. Who are struck dead for lying. And I wonder about you, and you can answer this question, but how many times do we do the same thing, where we think, God won't be aware. I'll just do this. Surely God won't, surely God really doesn't mind about that little correction to my tax return.

That little white lie. I'm doing it out of good reason after all. It's not like it's a dirty black lie, whatever a black lie is. God is holy.

He calls us, his people, to holiness. Yes, God minds. the story, as we've read, continues after the battle, after the failure.

[13:38] Joshua seeks God for what's gone wrong, thinking God's let them down. Funny how often, when things don't go as we want them, we too think things like this.

Maybe God didn't listen to that prayer when I told him what I wanted him to do. Do you know, the Lord wants to help us to meet him in those moments where we're disappointed, in those moments where we're sad.

Not thinking, though, that God's let us down, but instead to ask the question, Lord, what are you doing here? You see, when we pray, we don't just tell God, we listen for God.

It's such an important thing. Just as it actually happens here, he sort of tells God, almost gives God sort of a hard time over, why have you done this?

Why have you brought us across the Jordan and all this and now you're letting us down, God?

There we go, I've told God now. And in his grace and mercy, the Lord still speaks back.

[14:46] He says, oh, hold on a moment. You're missing something here. And he makes it so clear that one man's sin has affected the whole of Israel.

And as a result of that, 36 people have died. If that wasn't bad enough, though, the whole of the people of Israel have been tarnished by this sin. Can I just highlight the fact that when we sin, when we're part of a church, we too can open the door to sin in our church.

Sin is not a light thing which we can make light of. Just to explain something going on here, you may think, what's going on with, oops, knocked my glasses off, what's going on here with God and why's he gone against the whole of Israel when it was, all that sort of stuff?

Understand, this whole story isn't, sorry, is about God fighting for a people who are committed to him. Okay, God's fighting for his people.

He's taking them into Canaan, he's winning battles for them, but he isn't going to do that when the people, the whole people, tarnished by Achan's sin are effectively in rebellion to him because he's holy and he's going to have nothing to do with a people who aren't, who aren't giving themselves to him, who are allowing sin to happen in the camp because of course the reality is, you know, while

Achan did this, others will probably be aware that it happened.

[16:40] Certainly the family, you know, oh, dad, why are you digging a hole in your tent? Oh, don't worry, son. They'd know. That's probably why the whole of his household is stoned.

their rebellion breaks God's covenant with his people, effectively making them just like the Canaanites because the Lord is not going to bless them because they are not pursuing him, because they're not his holy people.

They are in rebellion to God. And so we come to this point where then there is a call to consecrate themselves.

What does that mean? Well, it means prepare yourselves, prepare to encounter with God. That's really what it's getting at. Prepare yourselves to encounter with God. I'm reasonably old now and I've been a Christian for quite a long period of time, over 40 years.

I don't know if there are others of you who perhaps were around 20, 30 years ago came across this phrase sometimes where you had somebody quite prophetic coming into the church, perhaps a visitor, and you knew they were going to preach but they were probably also going to bring some words from God.

[17:56] People would sometimes joke about, oh, make sure you've sorted everything out with God before you go to that meeting because you never know you may get picked out and that sin may be highlighted. Does that ring a bell with a few people?

Do you ever come across that? Maybe it's just me. Okay, maybe it's just me. But actually there's a real point there. God is holy. He's going to have nothing to do with our sin and he will expose our sin.

At some point all of our sin will be exposed that it's not been resolved at the cross. It may be that day when you get to the final, the judgment seat of God. If it's not being covered by the cross, if it's not being dealt with, it will be shown because God's holy and can have nothing to do with our sin. So what can we learn from this passage? Well, the first thing is this. God is holy and hates all big block, capital letters, please, sin. Anything which makes man stand independent of God where basically man says, hey, I'm God, I'm in control, I'm in charge.

that's at the root of all sin. I don't want anything to do with God. I'm not going to allow him to be in control of my life. I want to be in control of it. Second thing is this, God won't be mocked.

[19:21] We are so easy to try and persuade ourselves that, oh, I can get away with that, God's not taken me out for it yet, so I can get away with it, so I'll do a bit more. Well, we really can't.

As I said earlier, all sin will be exposed at some point in our lives, either during our lives or at the end of our lives. God is holy.

Leviticus 19, verse 2. Be holy as I am holy, says the Lord. Luke 12, 2. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known.

That is Jesus giving us the same sort of warning, basically. Watch out. Sin which is hidden, which has not been dealt with, will be exposed. It will be disclosed. Third thing I want us to just reflect on. Our individual sin can affect God's blessing, not just on my life, but on my household and my church and even the church corporate, as in globally, the church.

[20:37] We bring God into disrepute. We open the door to the evil one. Gives him a, God a foothold, gets a foothold.

Can I say, this is why church discipline is so important. We often sort of, oh, church discipline, Matthew 18, don't know what to do with that.

It starts with the one-on-one. If I'm aware of a brother or sister who is in sin, I should go and talk with them. If they do not listen to me, then I take a witness, next step.

Eventually, you take it to the elders of the church and if this person is still not repentant, then you put them out of the church. The aim, by the way, here is not punishment.

The aim is restoration. The aim is to say, let's be a holy people. Let's help one another be a holy people. Let's encourage one another to be a holy people. That means we deal with sin when it happens and we address it and we move on, knowing that once sin has been addressed at the cross, that the blood of Jesus is sufficient, that we are separated from our sin as far as the east is from the west, as it says in Psalm 103, which, by the way, is infinity if you think how far the east is from the west when you don't put it around the world.

[22:00] It goes on and on and on and on. Let's be wary also of tolerating the sin, therefore, of others.

Fourth thing. What is sin? I've used this word so much. What do we mean by sin? I just want to try and unpackage some thoughts on sin for a bit. I said it ultimately is anything which goes against God.

I guess at its heart is a selfishness which says I'm going to put myself first ahead of God, a rebellion against who God is and his ways.

Well, I know that actually the Lord's calling me to do this and I choose to do that. Let's talk about a few things which perhaps we don't mention very often.

The obvious one here is covetousness. Wanting things more than God. Wanting a particular thing more than God. Longing for that thing much more than God whereby it takes power over me and it then dominates my life.

[23 : 10] that's the result of covetousness. Judgmentalism. Judging other people.

I'd like to talk about some of these things. What about gossip? Talking about other people and situations which are nothing to do with us but which make great news stories.

can often happen particularly when we're feeling upset or challenged or that person has upset us. We're called not to gossip.

Friends, let's be really careful that we don't do that. Another way of thinking about sin would be living life without reference to God. In other words, what he calls us to be or who he calls us to be as well as what he calls us to do.

And there's some amazing warnings which we could read I'm not going to because we haven't got time in the book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 in those letters to the churches about not being hot or cold but tepid and being spat out and things like that because of our sin.

[24 : 27] Another area, broken relationships with other believers particularly resulting in hatred. Resulting in oh I talk badly about them. That's gossip by the way as well.

or I'm not having anything to do with them. I think God's heart breaks where there's Christians who aren't prepared to forgive one another and deal with issues and resolve them properly and well.

Then there's of course the whole list in Galatians chapter 5. We know Galatians chapter 5 because of course we've got the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. I don't know about you, I'm not so good at remembering the list of things which Galatians 5 talks about just a few verses earlier.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious. Sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, bits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

If the list wasn't quite comprehensive enough, that nails it. Of course, we could add into that things like addictions, things which take a superior place over our relationship and walk with God, things which control us, which control our lives more than, or which define our lives more than God does.

[26 : 22] Of course, addictions could be things like, they're not just drugs, I think we all like to think that addictions are things other people have got. And yet, too easily, actually, we do too. We just make them much more sociable, less socially acceptable, whether it's social media, whether it's caffeine, whether it's food, just generally overeating, sugar, drinks, all sorts, there's so many things there.

Sins also, though, about what we think, not just what we do, Jesus makes that clear. If you look at the person lustfully, you're committing sin.

So I'll pause there for a moment. This isn't my notes, I just feel the Spirit of God just stirring that. There's people in this room who need to hear that, because you're looking at pornography, and you've always thought, oh, it's harmless, not doing any harm for anyone.

it's harming you and your walk with God. It is sinful. You're looking with lust in your eyes, and it's taking you places you should not be going.

Deceit, especially self-deceit. We kid ourselves, we're okay. And the Bible clearly says we're not.

[27 : 57] We kid ourselves, God doesn't really know, when in fact he does, and he weeps over our sin. We justify ourselves, I've already mentioned it, it's only a white lie, that behavior's okay, it's not.

They're based on lies, they're based, all sin really is based ultimately on lies about who God is and who we are, and whether we're going to live for him or not. And of course, we've often talked about, or I've often talked about this, where we seek our identity and our worth in other things outside of God, rather than choosing to find those in him.

It's quite a long list, isn't it? we'll now have a short break. Doesn't that look lovely? Beautiful beach, sand, cliffs, water, a bit muddy off the edge, but actually beautiful blue water beyond.

The reason I can tell you that is I took the picture. I was there 10, 11 days ago. We were on the Isle of White having a short break, Emma and I, Emma's favourite hairdresser is on the Isle of White. If we're there, Emma tries to line up having her hair cut while on the Isle of White. The hairdresser removed venue. She was in a building at the top of park, walked and walked across the footpath, started walking down it and there was a sign which said please note the steps down to the beach have been closed.

[29 : 49] Due to coastal erosion, half of them have been washed away type of thing and there's no access to the beach. I thought that's fine. I'll walk down to the cliff top and look from the cliff top.

Now of course you know I didn't stop there because this photo is clearly not taken from the cliff top. I get to the cliff top and they put two wooden bits of 4x2 across the top of the steps going down to the beach but they hadn't put them very high.

It wasn't much of a barrier but there was a big sign on it saying don't go down here. And as I was contemplating to the road so I waited for them to come up and said is it safe?

I said oh yeah yeah the first half of the steps are absolutely fine the second half of the steps have been completely washed away but somebody has put a rope in with knots so you can walk down the cliff holding onto the rope and the knots we do it every day we live here there's lots of people do! it no problem! so I thought I would why not it's only a beach they're really only advisory signs I mean it's not really law is it so they say they're close to the path well actually maybe it is so I walked down the steps were great the knotted rope was fantastic it held fine by the way I was wearing sliders which probably isn't the best sort of footwear for going down a bit of a cliff get to the end of the rope and there's just a couple of steps I guess it would be the equivalent of perhaps three steps worth if you go down a staircase that sort of height wasn't very much at all I thought that's fine and I took my first step and my slider slipped on my foot and it caught on this sort of rocky sand if I can call it that it's hard compacted coarse rough sand and I went down on one leg and from about there to about there

[31 : 54] I grazed deeply my leg in fact this is only the second time I've worn long trousers in the last nine days because it hurts even wearing long trousers because the graze took off quite a lot of skin and it took many days to stop bleeding and you don't need to know all the detail or maybe that was too much detail anyway so easy to think I know better so easy to be swayed by other people it's so easy to think oh that won't do me any harm now praise god there is no last long term harm I may be a bit more chastened next time I have the opportunity to go down to the beach but sin wrecks lives it wrecks our relationship with god it wrecks our walk with him our intimacy with him but it also wrecks the lives of those gods put around us

I want to encourage us as we come to a conclusion on this passage let's learn from Achan let's let God's word dwell richly in our hearts such that we don't ignore it let's be aware of what the father calls us to and what he calls us not to let's not hide our sinful behaviour let's help one another to deal with our sinful behaviour and to live out in purity and holiness to the life God's called us to one final observation on Achan while he does that to a degree we never see he repents let's be a people who are quick to see our sin and quick to repent knowing that the cross of Christ is sufficient for every sin every sin we can be forgiven through the cross of

Christ through the death resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ on the cross all sin without any exception whatsoever even yes that deepest darkest thing you've never told anyone about is dealt with at the cross for those who come and say God forgive me would you wash me in the blood of Jesus so that I can be clean and spotless so I can relate with you God that I don't have to live in shame I don't have to live in darkness I don't have to live away from you father but I can enjoy your love and God help me fill!

with the Holy Spirit that I would live that life you have called me to not playing around with sin not messing around with sin but live out that life the Spirit of God wants to encourage each and every one of us to do walking hand in hand with him avoiding sin and shame I started with a warning it was a challenging passage of scripture I guess you probably understand why I found it challenging I hope it's also spoken to you because God loves to speak to us through his word a couple of final comments God hates all sin let's be real before God let's ask him to show us the things we need to address and then let's do so now I don't say that lightly I remember years and years and years ago when I was at Bible college somebody sort of proffered that as a prayer and said hey why don't you

ask

God to reveal all your sin and shame to you and then deal with it before him it was like a till roll where the till just got stuck on sorry you young people don't know what a roll is any how good are you it was long gradually working through those things things which I hadn't resolved for years things which happened even before I became a Christian let's live lives where we're quick to deal with sin we don't hold on with it we deal with it coming and finding the grace of God repenting of what we've done wrong and we come and say God renew my heart and renew my mind help me to think differently help me to live differently by the power of your Holy Spirit that I would glorify you and you alone can you stand please I'm going to lead us into a prayer ultimately though you need to pray your prayer if you find what

[36 : 59] I'm going to say helpful feel free to use it but if you want to pray a different way Lord we hear your word oh God move in our lives give us a hatred of sin help us to always come back to the cross as soon as possible when we've done something and got something wrong but oh God teach us train us help us by your spirit to live lives where we avoid sin at all costs where we don't hold sin lightly and justify ourselves but where we have a right horror of sin and we see the effects it has on us and our households and our church family and beyond and we live lives holy as you are holy in Jesus name Amen