

Sunday October 6, 2019
Lesson 6: Hidden Inside
Scripture: Joshua 7: 1, 12-13, 20-23

Context:

The next focus on God moves back to the Old Testament. The text comes from the book of Joshua and focuses on a story that is not as well known or preached from the pulpit. The main character in the text is Achan from the tribe of Judah and his story reveals to us the importance of respect and reverence to God.

In this less known story in the book of Joshua, there is a glimpse into the larger themes going on in the book. The book of Joshua is part of what is known as the Deuteronomistic History, (the DTR for short). These books include Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and are all connected to the book of Deuteronomy and the history found there.¹ There are three major themes found throughout these books that describe Israel's early history and formation as a nation. The first is that the exclusive worship of Yahweh is a prerequisite for Israel's continued possession of and prosperity in the Promised Land.² The second theme is that worship should occur only in the place that God wants worship to occur (mainly the Jerusalem Temple).³ A third theme that comes later one is that of a covenant made by Yahweh with the dynasty founded by David.⁴ The text for this morning focuses on two of these themes, revealing the relevance of the story in the Joshua narrative.

Achan took some of the sacred items and hid them from the traveling band of Israelites. As such, the Israelites face defeat as a whole battalion is destroyed in their conquest of a city and territory. Joshua goes before the Lord and it is revealed there are those who have transgressed the covenant and stolen things that do not belong to them. As such, God reminds them of the covenant and asks that Joshua sanctify the people, including those who have transgressed.

The result is that Achan is brought before the assembly with all that he owns and is asked to make a confession. A public show is made of his confession and all the leaders are present to hear how he has betrayed God and his people. He is then stoned to death, has all things including his family burned and stoned, and then a marker is made to remember his transgression. The story is a tragedy. So many innocent lives are ruined because of a person who has failed and only thought of his desire for material things. The story reminds us of the fragility of life as well as the importance of respect and devotion to God.

¹ Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 194.

² Ibid., 195.

³ Ibid., 195.

⁴ Ibid., 195.

Application

Of all the lessons, this one is perhaps hardest in learning about who God is and how God works in our lives. Achan's story is one that reminds us that the walk with Jesus is not always pretty and full of rainbows and sunshine. There are hard truths about human nature and about the choices we make everyday.

God has given humanity the great gift of free will, meaning that we are able to choose what we want to do with our lives. This is an incredible freedom and one that gives us great hope. Every day we have choices that we can make about our time, our energy, and our relationships. We can even choose how deep we will go in our walk with Christ. We are given the opportunity to surrender and accept God's call on our lives.

Yet this free will also brings great responsibility. We are given choices every day about how we will live our lives. We can choose to be a good colleague and employee or employer. We can choose to be a supportive and encouraging spouse. We can make the decision if we will be a good friend and love those around us. We have the ability daily to read scripture, reflect, pray, and confess to God where we need help and where we struggle.

As we see in the case of Achan, it is easy to make the wrong choices. We justify them by giving excuses for ourselves. Yet as we do, we may not see how those decisions have a ripple effect on those around us just as Achan's decision to take the sacred things led to the decimation of warriors, his own family, and ultimately himself.

If we are lazy or gossipy colleagues, we can create an air of distrust in our work situation. If we are not supportive spouses, our spouse will feel unloved and ultimately the marriage will begin to struggle. If we choose to either betray or neglect a friend, we shouldn't be surprised when we turn around and discover that a person has moved on or found more fulfilling and healthy relationships.

It is not a call so much to be perfect as it to be honest about our growing edges and where we mess up. Throughout scripture, we see that God is always honest with the people. When God is upset, the people are notified. Whether through intermediaries such as Joshua or through some act in nature, God communicates that accountability is important to any relationship.

In the midst of conflict, I have observed that issues grow worse when one or more parties refuse to own up to their mistakes or actually deal with their own issues in a professional manner. Their inability to acknowledge their own role in a problem though rarely affects just them. A ripple occurs as multiple people begin to feel the weight of someone who does not deal with their own issues. It may be the anxious leader who wants everyone else to feel their anxiety, so that they create a culture that hinders the whole group from moving forward. It may be the narcissist who refuses to actually name how they have hurt others and their own brokenness or wounded nature. Everyone has to tiptoe around this narcissist and no actual progress can be made. The group is hindered as a whole.

What we can learn from the story of Achan is that God has created us for good. While we will mess up and sin, God still offers forgiveness. Yet this does not let us off the hook to make excuses and not do the hard self-examination that comes with life. Instead, we are given free will and can choose to grow or remain stunted without growing

in our walk Christ. And in either direction, our decisions can have a ripple effect on our families, friends, communities, and churches.

Why is it easy to justify doing the wrong thing? How do we slip into negative behaviors that we think will just affect us without realizing the consequences for everyone? What are ways that we show disrespect to God and to the communities we live in? How can we be more respectful of others and God?

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