

# This Sunday's Sermon

## WHEN THE LORD'S ANGER BURNS – JOSHUA 7:1, 19-26

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**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 burned against Israel. Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me." Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are 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. Then 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 had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.**



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

"What's the big deal?" could have been a thought that was going through Achan's mind. Achan was one of the Israelites involved in the battle of Jericho. He had marched around the city for six days, and on the seventh day he marched around the city seven more times and the walls came a tumbling down. Achan along with the other Israelites charged into the city and destroyed anyone that was still alive. When the battle was over, the gathering of plunder began. Achan had found a wonderfully woven garment from Babylon, some silver and some gold and he took them. He argued, "What's the big deal?"

"The big deal" is that Achan's actions placed his desires before God and set off a chain reaction of God's anger burning against the Israelites. If there's one thing the story of Achan brings out is that God's wrath is not just brought down on the blatant, grievous injustices, but even on what we might consider small. And if there is one thing the Bible makes very clear is not to take God's anger lightly. WHEN THE LORD'S ANGER BURNS:

1. There is trouble brewing and
2. Trouble will be brought down

(1)

So the city of Jericho, the gateway to the promised land God was giving to his people, had fallen. God's specific commands with this city was to completely destroy it, this included not only the people and

the animals, but all of the plunder and wealth as well. There would be other cities the Israelites could plunder for themselves, but Jericho was his. It was his way of telling the Israelites that he was responsible for the victory. God would have the first “offerings” of this new land he was bringing them into.

From what the Bible tells us, the Israelites listened to this command not to take any loot for themselves, all it seems, except a man by the name of Achan. Secretly he grabbed some plunder for himself, but did not let anyone know about it. While no man knew of Achan’s treachery, God did, and **“the Lord’s anger burned against Israel.”** The next town to be conquered on Israel’s conquest of the promised land was a town by the name of Ai (spelled just how it sounds). It was not a large city, so the entire army was not needed. Joshua, the leader of the Israelites at this time sent 3,000 men to take the city. But a surprising thing happened, the Israelites lost, and quite handily. Joshua is shocked, he is surprised, he asks God what has happened. If they could not take a small town like Ai, what chance do they have at taking the rest of the land of Canaan? Joshua’s first concern was not about his leadership capabilities, but God’s name – God’s name would be disgraced if he allowed them to be slaughtered.

God’s answer to Joshua could not have been more clear. **“Israel has sinned...They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions...I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.”** So all the Israelites gathered before the tabernacle, that portable worship area which contained the presence of God, in order to find out who had disobeyed God’s command. By a process of lot, guided by God, they narrowed down the perpetrator to one man – Achan.

This is where our reading picks back up. Joshua confronts Achan, but not in a harsh way. He says, **“My son, give glory to the Lord and give him praise.”** Joshua is giving Achan the opportunity to repent, much like God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to repent after they fell into sin. And to Achan’s credit he does confess. He confesses everything, he confesses every detail – the cloak, the silver, the gold, even where it is hidden, down to the silver hidden beneath the other two. The question that scholars wrestle with is whether Achan’s confession was genuine, or was he just confessing because he got caught. That really isn’t the main part of the story. The main point is WHEN THE LORD’S ANGER BURNS, there is trouble brewing The trouble brewing was Achan taking what was not his to take.

Joshua sent some men to discover Achan’s guilt, and they returned with everything just as Achan had told them. They set them out before the tabernacle in the presence of God and the people. Before the people took Jericho, God warned them of the punishment of anyone who disobeyed: **“keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them.”** The destruction had to be complete. So they dragged Achan, his family and all his animals and possessions to the valley that bears his name and stoned him there. They heaped stones over him and burned the rest of his belongings. All of this in the name of the Lord. Only then did **“the Lord turn from his fierce anger.”**

Pretty intimidating stuff, right? It makes us pretty glad that we didn’t live in that time, where what seemed like such a minor crime was punishable by death. Maybe it might even make you wonder why you should even follow a God who could be so cruel and vindictive. Is God’s anger the same today? Or

maybe could such a God's anger burn against me if I don't listen to him. As we take a look at the story, there are a few things that jump out.

First of all because of the sin of one man, the whole nation has to suffer trouble and humiliation. Achan brought this down upon his people, he brought down the defeat against Ai, and he brought down the Lord's anger on the nation of Israel. To us, it just seems so harsh. We think couldn't God have just punished Achan instead of the whole people? Yes, he could have done that, but he didn't. God dealt with the people of Israel as a unit, this was part of the warning God gave before Jericho. One sin of disobedience would bring trouble down upon the camp.

What might seem like something minor to us, was anything but minor to God. What Achan did was not only disobeying God's orders not to take any of the plunder from the city, he was very literally stealing against God. God was the one who conquered the city, and God was the one who now possessed all the spoils of war. By Achan taking gold and silver, he stole from God. Achan put himself before God when he took the stuff, and he kept himself before God when he hid it. Achan's sin was more than just a moment of weakness. It was a genuine thought that he could get away with disobeying God.

God let the Israelites know how serious he is about sin, every sin. And when we remember that, it changes our whole perspective on the sins in our life. God doesn't strike us down like he did Achan every time we sin. But God's anger is burning every time we sin. Our sins are no longer "innocent" sins, "harmless" sins, "minor" sins. They are sins against a holy God. David confesses in the Psalms, **"Against you and you only have I sinned."** And just like Achan's sin affected the whole nation of Israel, one of our sins affects our whole relationship with God.

The second thing that jumps out to me in this story is Achan's confession. He was given the opportunity to confess by his leader Joshua, and he took it. That is more than can be said for Adam and Eve when God allowed them an opportunity to confess, and more than can be said of King David when he was confronted of his sin of adultery by the prophet Nathan, and oftentimes it is more than can be said of us. But here, Achan's confession was not just a general confession, "I'm a sinner." He does say that, but he goes further. He said, "I have sinned," I have missed the mark. But this is how I have sinned, **"I saw...I coveted...I took...and I hid."** Maybe he thought it was useless trying to hide it anymore, maybe he thought his punishment would be less with a confession. Whatever the reason was, Achan's confession can serve as a model for us.

All too often we take refuge in the crowd when we say "We are sinners," or even "I'm a sinner." It's easier to confess that and jump quickly to "...but Jesus loves me." The knife of the law cuts far deeper when we admit, "I have sinned by looking at that adult rated website," "I have sinned when I lost my temper at my kids or my wife," "I have sinned when I exaggerated a few numbers on my tax return," "I have sinned when my balanced checkbook comes at the expense of my offerings." And each and every one of those sins is a sin against God and his holy name, and worthy of sending us straight to hell. This is what our sins deserve, no, this is what my sins deserve.

And look at what happened to Achan, his confession did not result in a clean slate before God. God punished him for what he did, just as he should punish us for all that we have done, do, and will do. Our confession does not bring about a subsiding of God's holy wrath, but our confession lets us know why his wrath exists. And the name of the place Joshua took Achan to, did you catch that? The valley of Achor.

Achor is a word that means “trouble.” This was the valley of trouble – named for the trouble that Achan brought down on the Israelites with his actions, and the trouble that God brought down on Achan and his family. From that day forth, every man, woman and child that would walk that way would be reminded of the trouble there is in disobeying God.

It would be a pretty grim story if it all ended there, right? We would be trying to not get in trouble with God, always left to wonder if God would bring his anger down on us. There is no assurance there, because there is always something we can think of that God could punish us for. The assurance therefore cannot be found in ourselves, it must be found in someplace else. God, speaking through the prophet Hosea, a guy that lived several hundred years after this event, wrote about the Valley of Achor. He said this, **“I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”**

This door of hope spoke of the time of the messiah. This door of hope made the impossible, possible. The messiah’s saving acts would fill the earth’s most dismal low points with uplifting hope. By his blood he would set in place the unconditional new covenant in which the Lord declares, **“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** God’s anger burns until trouble is snuffed out. And just as God’s anger burned against Achan and his family, so God’s anger burned against his only son on the cross. And this was done so that his anger no longer burns against me.

And so our life takes on a whole new meaning, it gives us a new door of hope into a whole new world. Even as life-long Christians it’s good for us to be reminded of this. This door of hope allows us to rest our worries about family on Jesus, it allows us to set our burdens of life before him. This door of hope gives us opportunity to praise and serve him. The door of hope is a big deal, and the way we live our lives is a big deal too. May God give us strength to live our lives as a big deal toward him because of the big deal he made for us. Amen.