

Broken Covenant, Broken Conquest

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 August 2014

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 0 0] Good afternoon, and welcome to our Wednesday Lunchtime Bible Talk. My name's Josh, I'm part of the staff team here, and if you weren't with us last week, we began a series on Joshua for three weeks, which we'll be picking up again today.

So we began last week, and we saw that Israel were about to begin their conquest, to take the promised land, to carry out judgment on wicked Canaan, and to finally put an end to the wandering. What happened? God delivered Jericho into their hands. God won a victory for Israel. All Israel had to do was obey, to carry out the instructions that would lead to the wall falling down. But there was also a ban put on the gold and silver. Israel were to devote these to God's treasury, not to take any of it for themselves. This was particularly important for our passage today. It's said in Joshua 6, 18, But you 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 and bring trouble upon it.

So before we read, or we pick up now, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can join together this Wednesday afternoon, join together as people who believe and trust your son Jesus. We thank you for his wonderful grace to save us, to redeem us, and to make us a people that are your church. And as we draw to hear from your word today, we pray that you'd be speaking by your spirit from it, that you would be awakening our hearts to love you more and more, to trust your son for all that we need, all of his grace, more and more, to equip us to serve you better this week. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So we're going to be reading Joshua chapter 7 today. Joshua 7. This follows straight on from where we left off after Jericho, beginning at verse 1.

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things. For Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things, and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Bethheaven, east of Bethel, and said to them, Go up and spy out the land. And the men went up and spied out Ai.

[3 : 0 1] And they returned to Joshua and said to him, Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.

So about three thousand men went up there from the people, and they fled before the men of Ai. The men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, 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. O Lord, what can I say when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies? 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? And what will you do for your great name? The Lord said to Joshua, Get up. Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned.

They have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. Therefore, the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.

Get up. Consecrate the people and say, Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow. For thus says the Lord, God of Israel, there are devoted things in your midst. O Israel, you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you. In the morning, therefore, you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households. And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man. And he who has taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire. He and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel. And verses 16 to 21 show us this process happening, the lots. And it's revealed that Achan is the one to have sinned. Of course, we know that from verse 1. So we're going to pick up in verse 22 again. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent. And behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the Lord. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the cloak, and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters, and his oxen and donkeys, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had. And they brought them up to the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today. And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones.

[6 : 56] And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day, the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

When I was at school, I used to get into a spot of bother because of who I was friends with. There was a guy in the class who had a particular skill and liking for getting into trouble.

So it is a regular occurrence that as we began a class, a senior teacher would come and visit and say, While your class were in whatever room for whatever class previously, there was a window smashed, a table damaged, a wall destroyed. We've asked for the culprits or the culprits to own up, but nobody has. So I'm afraid everyone in the class is going to be in detention.

You know the rules that apply. If you as a class break them, you as a class will be punished. One person had committed the crime, but we as a class were going to suffer and be punished for it because as a class, we had broken the rules. Well, we come across something similar in our passage today, but in a much, much more serious fashion. This isn't just a case of taking some gold that we shouldn't.

It's not just a little slip up. Sin is a serious thing. And as we take a closer look at Joshua 7, it's helpful to see how the text fits together. So firstly, in verses 1 to 5, we see a symptom, which shows us that there is a fury for faithlessness. And then in verses 6 to 21, there's the sin, which makes clear that a broken relationship with God is disastrous.

[9 : 01] And then finally, and thankfully, in verses 22 to 26, there's a solution. God's wrath on one saves many.

After the great highs of victory in Jericho, the conquest has started successfully. God's been faithful to his people. He's starting to give the land to Israel. And you can imagine there'd be a buzz around the camp. Nothing can stop us now. We've seen the commander of the Lord's army. We've destroyed Jericho. Who's next? Ai is next. And with it, we see the symptom, fury for faithlessness.

Now, this battle was not lost for tactical feelings. This battle wasn't lost because Joshua became complacent. This battle was lost because Israel didn't obey. Look at verse 1. It tells us from the off, the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. The problem here is that Israel had disobeyed. God's wrath is present on them. His fury is lurking. And verse 1 shows us its presence.

And to bookend the passage, if you look at verse 26, God's wrath is turned away. Verse 1, it's present. Verse 26, it's turned away. So this whole passage is about Israel breaking faith and God's wrath on that. So how does it play out? Well, Ai is the next stop on the conquest. And after the delight of Jericho is the dismay here.

What happened to God leading his people to victory? Has the commander of Yahweh's army abandoned them? It seems promising. Verse 2, Joshua's continuing the task assigned to him. He sends spies out to the next city. The reports come back saying, we should only send a few thousand. Ai is small. They are but few.

[11 : 23] It should be straightforward. Just send a few thousand men. And so knowing that Joshua is their leader, affirmed by God, they move on with plans. The next city should be little problem.

But look what happens in verse 4. They fled. And about 36 die. And they're pursued by this little people of Ai. This is a disaster. This little city causes havoc for Israel.

After the fortress of Jericho has been destroyed, they're made to flee with tears between their legs. And look at verse 5. And look at verse 5. The hearts of the people melted and became as water.

There's a problem. Joshua 6 shows us the wonderful victory God ensured. But as he did so, there was a command to obedience. He takes care of victory. We must obey.

And so we must be aware that God's present blessing on our life doesn't excuse disobedience.

[12 : 37] We must not get caught up in the hype of a success over Jericho, of a successful ministry in Sunday school, or personal evangelism, one-to-ones. We must not get caught up in finally overcoming a sinful habit and get complacent. We must not get caught up in the midst of the curse of a sinful habit.

We must not get caught up in the midst of a sinful habit. We must not get caught up in the midst of a sinful habit. Israel enjoyed the grace of victory over Jericho and then was routed at Ai. This is the symptom of something grievous that's wrong. I've struggled to count the number of people who are active in leading fruitful ministries and CUs, but have fallen. Have you heard of any ministers who've had a fruitful ministry and then some sort of sex scandals come out, some sort of tampering with finances, and it all falls flat?

Look again at 7.1. But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things. Right after the victory of Jericho, we see that God's anger burns.

We know what's going on. They didn't. So at this point of the story, they just see a symptom of a problem. We know the problem is faithlessness and it's brought fury, his anger, his wrath against Israel, which should show us that sin, disobedience is serious. God takes it seriously.

The symptom in the story is defeat. Now let's see the sin. And the sin, this section in verse 6 to 21, shows us that a broken relationship with God is a disaster.

[14 : 45] It is disastrous. We've seen already that God's anger is burning against Israel, and now God speaks and tells them exactly why. In verse 6, Joshua and all the elders, in a state of questioning, have torn their clothes.

They're mourning and grieving in front of the ark. They cry out to God, why? Why did you bother bringing us across the Jordan if you're just going to hand us over to be destroyed?

What was wrong with leaving us there? This is a disaster for Israel. They've had to run from their enemies.

And we know that word of God's mighty saving acts had spread to Jericho. So now would word of God's people being crushed also spread?

Well, verse 9 tells us this very thing. If word spreads, surely they would be cut off. And Joshua's plea, the end of verse 9, What will you do for your great name?

[15 : 57] He's pleading from the pit of despair. How will the Lord respond? Will he have the answer? We have the answer in verse 10. Get up.

Why have you fallen on your face? The Lord tells them they've sinned and broken his covenant. They've broken the very relationship that brings them privilege.

In the midst of the great victory of Jericho, in the midst of being assured that they would win, all Israel had to do was obey. But verse 11, reminding us again of verse 1, tells us that they had taken what they weren't allowed.

They had mixed with the wickedness of the Canaanites, polluting themselves with their goals and treasuring this above faithfulness to their God.

To get the grotesqueness of this, let me paint you a picture. My brother had just got married on Monday. It's a wonderful occasion.

[17 : 03] But imagine his wife, a few days after returning from honeymoon, cheated on him. A relationship that started so bright and was fulfilling its intention, suddenly ruptured so deeply.

That's a picture of the grotesqueness of this. Look at verse 12, the most shattering blow that Israel and its leaders could hear.

The people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs because they have become devoted for destruction.

I will be with you no more unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. There is sin present and it's a massive problem.

God will let Israel's enemies do to them what Israel did to Jericho. If you remember last week, the reason Israel were taking the land was not because of their own righteousness, but because of the wickedness of the inhabitants.

[18 : 17] So if Israel are disobedient, then they're going to face a similar fate. What separates God's people from any other is the covenant they have with him.

A covenant's not an old dusty word for theologians to sound clever. No, covenant is the basis of the one relationship. That Israel, that Christians have with our God.

God has shown himself as saviour to Israel, redeeming them from slavery. He's shown himself as commander, leading them in battle. But he's also, as our God said to them, that they will be his treasured possession if they keep his covenant.

He is our saviour and our king, so he's to be obeyed. Just as Israel were his firstborn, we too are adopted as his children.

Any breaking of his covenant is not only treason, it's also like a little child screaming at their father that they hate him, that they want rid of him.

[19 : 33] It's like a new bride cheating on her husband. So the problem here is a broken covenant, a broken relationship. And until it is reconciled and mended, the conquest is doomed.

They'll be cut off by their enemies. And thankfully for Israel, God is gracious. He will restore his favour once the devoted things are removed and the rebellion against him has been dealt with.

So verses 14 to 21, detail to us the process of finding out who the culprit is. God's wrath will be poured out on this man, on his family and all that he has.

Verse 15, he has transgressed my covenant. He has done an outrageous thing in Israel. And so we find out that this man is Achan, who confesses in verse 20, that he sinned against the Lord.

He's stolen what he shouldn't have and hid it in his tent. Verse 21, how careful we must be that when things are going well, that we may think God is blessing all that we're doing.

[20 : 48] Oh, how careful we must be in these times to be obedient to all that he has said, lest it all come tumbling down like it has for Achan.

We mustn't think a little bit of seemingly inconsequential sin in the midst of the Tron here will bring new ramifications.

This one sin by one man had the potential to end God's relationship with his people. And our sin affects the whole church, maybe not always as quickly and as obviously as this, but it can show its face in more subtle ways, relational difficulties, fallouts, because of our sinful hearts.

And this is so disastrous here with Achan because it is a crucial point in the history of God's people.

We see something similar in Acts chapter 5 with Ananias and Sapphira. They die at the birth of the church because they've deceived fellow believers. Two crucial junctures in the history of God's people, the birth of the nation and the birth of the church.

[22 : 14] And if God's people weren't faithful here at the start, how could they ever live distinct lives worthy of being a redeemed people?

We see that God is ferocious about preserving his people and so he won't tolerate sin. But thankfully for us, this isn't the end of the story.

Let's look at the solution in verses 22 to 26. God's wrath on one saves many. God's wrath on one saves many.

Achan faced the wrath that he deserved to Israel's benefit. Verses 22 and 23, the stolen things are recovered. And then verse 24, Israel take Achan to the valley of Achor, the setting for the end of this saga and the end of the sinner.

These next verses should bring somberness to us. For this is the same end due to any who've sinned against God. Why did you bring trouble on us?

[23 : 31] The Lord brings trouble on you today and Achan is stoned. He's burned with fire and stoned with stones.

He took the punishment for sin that spared all Israel from the wrath of God. And then verse 26, the Lord turns from his burning anger.

The burning anger against the breaking of his covenant, against rebellion against him. This is how seriously God takes sin.

We may think, come on, give this guy a break. All he did was take some gold and silver. It's hardly worth all this talk of destruction, of being stoned and burned. It's hardly worth him and all his family and his belongings being destroyed.

But if this is how we're reacting, then we don't see sin the way the Bible does. And we don't see sin with the severity that God does. Do we not think that breaking covenant with God is severe?

[24 : 42] Do we think it's merely frowned upon? Something we know we shouldn't do, but if we do it, we'll be unnoticed and we'll get away with it?

Is that how we think about sin? Well, God takes it seriously enough to kill rebels over a golden idol, to kill rebels over mixing in sex with those who worship false gods.

and God takes sin so seriously that he would see his own son brutally murdered to deal with it.

Ralph Davis comments that the testimony of this chapter is that we cannot treat cancer with vitamin pills. It requires radical surgery.

We may think that cancer is no big deal, but that does not alter God's estimate. Achan put it throughout the whole of Israel by his sin.

[25 : 48] His sin caused the whole nation to have broken God's covenant, and God's rightful wrath was poured out on him. God was gracious to reveal the problem and to guide his people to solve it, and so Achan was buried in stones for treason against his king and for unfaithfulness to his loving saviour.

God's wrath on a nation was poured out in this one guilty man. But what about us? What about Christians?

What about us now in the 21st century in Glasgow as we break his covenant daily with our lives, as we struggle to be faithful, we have hope of someone far greater being buried on our behalf, one who is not guilty, one who is punished to spare a whole people, one whose name is Jesus, one who is punished once for all.

God still takes sin this seriously, but for us, each of us, feeling is dealt with. We're not doomed to Achan's fate for disobeying God if we trust Christ.

In my classroom dilemma where we all faced attention, all it would take was one person to say, it was me. And everyone else would be free.

[27 : 29] God's wrath still burns against our sin, but for those who trust Jesus, it was poured out in every lash of the whip on Christ, every jag of the thorns on his head, and finally, as each nail was pierced in his skin.

For the Christian, each rebellious act is covered. each rebellious act can be forgiven, but each one must push us more and more toward Christ to trust this one man who dealt with all of our punishment.

Our sin is dealt with in the brutal murder of Christ, but we must trust that it was done so completely. So fear not, Christian, we won't be stoned, but we must see how serious sin is.

God's wrath is poured out, but for us it is on one, and so he spares many. For us it was on Jesus, and he spares us.

let's pray as we close. Heavenly Father, we recognize and acknowledge that we all stumble, we all fall, we all sin, but Father, we are so thankful that you have given us one who took all your wrath, who presents us to you pure and blameless.

[29 : 11] So Father, help us to trust him, to trust that he has dealt with all our punishment, with all our sin, and help us to live lives of obedience to him.

For we long to love you as our Father, as we ought to. And so we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.