

God's Burning Anger

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[0 : 00] Well, let's grab our Bibles. Do grab a Bible. If you don't have a Bible, there's some over there and some down here and over at the side there.! And turn to the book of Joshua, please, chapter 7.

Paul Brennan will be preaching to us from this chapter later on. I think it's been some time since we've been in the book of Joshua together. And as you turn up that passage, let me say that in chapter 6, the Lord has by grace given His people victory over Jericho as they've come into the promised land.

And we're going to read about what happens next, a chapter that is really all about God's burning anger. So a sobering one.

Let's hear the word of the Lord. Let's read. 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.

[1 : 16] Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-Havan, east of Bethel. And said to them, Go up and spy out the land.

And the men went up and spied out Ai. Now 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.

And 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.

[2 : 24] 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 hand 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. And they have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen and lied. And put them among their own belongings.

[3 : 29] 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 is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire.

[4 : 40] 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.

So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe. And the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clans of Judah.

And the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man. And Zabdi was taken.

And he brought near his household man by man. And Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah was taken.

And Joshua said to Achan, my son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done.

[5 : 39] Do not hide it from me. And Achan answered Joshua, 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 two hundred shekels of silver. And a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels. Then I coveted them and took them. And see they are hidden in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath.

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 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?

[6 : 54] The Lord brings trouble on you today. 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. Therefore to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

Amen. And may God bless to us this, his sobering and true word. Very good. Very good. Very good. Well please do have Joshua 7 open there in front of you.

I'll spend a few moments thinking about this chat together. So Joshua 7, please have that open.

Now this whole episode comes as a bit of a bolt from the blue.

Up until this point in the book of Joshua, the conquest has gone very well. God's people have witnessed astonishing miracle after astonishing miracle.

[8 : 09] They've crossed the Jordan. They've heard the amazing reports from the spies that all Canaan was quaking in their boots. They melted in fear. And we saw in chapter 6, they walk around Jericho for a week and have this incredible victory over this walled city.

They defeated it with ease. Absolutely remarkable. Amazing. And these early chapters really do show us that God really is keeping his promises.

He's promising this land and they're taking it. They really are doing just as God instructs them to do. And we think it's going to be a breeze.

Things are off to a great start. However, the dust has barely settled from the collapsing walls of Jericho before things go badly and very rapidly off the rails. Chapter 7 begins with one of those words that cause you to sit up straight.

But, look at verse 1. But, the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things.

[9 : 19] And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. We're told there at the very beginning that Achan took some of the very things that Joshua, just a few verses earlier in chapter 6, had told them not to take.

Just flick back a page to chapter 6, verse 18, to see what Joshua said to the whole army of Israel. He says, He says, But you keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction.

In other words, the things that have been set apart for the Lord alone. Keep yourselves from those things, 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.

Joshua could not have been any clearer, could he? Do not touch the things set apart for the Lord. If you do, you will make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction itself.

Crystal clear. And yet, here in chapter 7, we read that one man, Achan, took some of the things that had been set apart for the Lord, the things devoted to destruction.

[10 : 36] And because he did that, there are implications for the whole nation. And as is so often the case, through the history of God's people, it's not the threat from outside that's the problem.

That is not what is most prone to derail God's people. It's actually the thing within. It's the threat from within God's people. That's a far more effective tactic from the enemy. And it's a very, very sobering chapter.

It wasn't a problem out there. It was a problem right in the middle of the camp. And so this passage is here to jolt us.

It's here to warn us. So that we might be alert to the temptations, the dangers that lurk in each one of our own hearts. Lest we sin and damage not just ourselves, but also God's precious church.

This is a chapter about the seriousness of sin. It's a chapter about God's right response to that. His anger burns against sin.

[11 : 48] That's how this chapter begins and ends. Look at verse 1. We read there about the anger of the Lord burning against the people of Israel.

And look how the chapter ends. Look at the very last verse, 26. Then the Lord turned from His burning anger. That's what brackets this chapter.

The burning anger of the Lord. So we're going to trace the story as it details the sin that caused the Lord's anger to burn against His people and how that anger was eventually turned away.

Let's look at the first couple of verses. Verses 1 to 5. We see God's anger at Achan's sin leads to defeat and battle. Now from Joshua's point of view, he's just overseen the remarkable, miraculous defeat of Jericho.

He's riding a wave of confidence. You can imagine the sense in the camp after Jericho's defeat.

The Lord has promised to be with them, to be with the people of Israel. And the previous chapter ends with these words.

[12 : 53] Look at verse 27 of chapter 6. So the Lord was with Joshua and his fame was in all the land. Joshua knew the rest of the land was there for the taking.

And so he sets about the next target, the city of Ai. Now we've heard what happened. How they were defeated. And you could make all sorts of judgment calls on Joshua's strategy here in terms of his military planning.

Should have sent more men. He was complacent. He shouldn't have sent out spies this time. But there's nothing here to suggest that Joshua's strategy was off at all. He was using sound judgment. Choosing the best course of action. Looking at the options presented to him. He was seeking to bring about victory. No, the problem was not his strategy. The reason for defeat is right there at the start of the chapter.

And it's not poor military strategy. Rather, the issue is the anger of the Lord burning against the people of Israel. The fact that Israel were defeated in what should have been a very straightforward battle, it was evidence of the Lord's burning anger.

[14 : 11] Compared to Jericho, Ai was a walk in the park. It did not present a threat. And yet, they were defeated. Joshua could have taken the entire army.

And the outcome would have been the same. Because the anger of the Lord was burning against the people of Israel. And notice the impact this defeat has on the people.

Not only have they lost men in battle, but end of verse 5, the hearts of the people melted. They became as water. And that picture of hearts melting, of turning to water, that up until now has been a reference to the people of Canaan.

They're the ones whose hearts have melted. But now, it's God's people, Israel. They're fearful.

Because of one man's sin, the people of Israel have become like the people of Canaan.

Frightened. Melting away. The impact of one man's sin on an entire nation was simply devastating.

[15 : 17] You see, sin like this is never just a private, personal matter. Don't buy the lie. That so long as it doesn't appear to hurt anybody else, it's permissible.

No, no. Sin always has rippling effects. Think about the opening chapter of the Bible, Genesis. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that there was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of it and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. That was a meal for two that changed the course of history. More than they could possibly have imagined.

So too, here for Achan. Seeing the clothes, the silver, the gold, he took them. He saw them, he took them, even though he was explicitly told not to.

And the consequences were devastating. And it's important for us to note the nature of Achan's sin here. It is apostasy.

[16 : 35] It is deliberate. His sin is not a small thing. It is absolute presumption. The very things that the Lord had said, these are set apart for me.

They are holy for me. Do not take them. Do not touch them. Achan took them. He heard what Joshua had said.

I just read those words from chapter 6, where Joshua could not have been clearer. Achan had heard that. But he just didn't think it applied to him.

He felt he was perhaps in a different category. Like the man who moves from affair to affair, thinking no one will find out. It's the attitude of, I'm Achan.

I can get away with this. I can do what I like. I know what God's word says, but I'm going to do things my way. Listen to these words from Moses.

[17 : 40] This is in Deuteronomy 29. Don't turn there, but listen. And these are words that Achan would have heard just a few weeks before. Listen to this as Moses addresses exactly this sort of situation that we read about here in Joshua.

Listen to this. Moses' words to the people. Beware, lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is being turned away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations.

Beware, lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of the sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, I shall be safe though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.

This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man.

And the curses written in this book will settle upon him. And the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven. And listen to this. And the Lord will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in the book of this law.

[19 : 05] It couldn't describe more perfectly exactly what Achan did. I shall be safe though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart. I will do what I want.

And in response, the Lord's anger will smoke against him. And he will single him out from all the tribes. He will single this one out. Achan heard those words.

And yet he did what he did. Friends, the human heart is capable of great deceit, isn't it? Achan convinced himself that he was justified in his actions.

He saw something. He wanted it and he took it. Even though he was expressly forbidden from doing so. It's very sobering but it's very telling of the human heart, isn't it?

And I wonder, have you convinced yourself that you are justified in your own behavior even though you know God's word expressly forbids it? have you convinced yourself that the rules don't apply to you?

[20 : 13] Have you convinced yourself that you deserve this secret pleasure? I'm Paul. I deserve this. Is the Lord putting his finger right on that hidden sin in your life this evening?

Well, if he is, then this really is a gracious warning for you. And I would plead with you not to leave this evening without confessing your sin to him, repenting.

Do it tonight before it's too late. Well, such is the nature of Achan's sin. In the next scene, we see the wider implications.

This was not a private matter. Look on to verses 6-9. We see that God's anger leads to perplexity not just for Achan but for Joshua, the entire people. Someone's phone is pinging.

Can you please make sure your phones are off? I can hear it pinging. Verses 6-9. God's anger leads to perplexity for Joshua.

[21 : 19] Now, rightly, Joshua is absolutely devastated by this defeat. Look at verse 6. He tore his clothes. He fell to the earth. Devastated.

Not only has the mission to capture Ai embarrassingly failed, not only has he lost men in battle, not only does he fear the destruction of Israel, but he also fears that the honor of the Lord's name is destroyed.

His great fear is for the name of the Lord. That's why he finishes his prayer, verse 9. What will you do for your great name? And he's utterly perplexed.

This defeat has come out of nowhere. Just think about the past few weeks in the life of Joshua and the people of Israel. Great words of promise in chapter 1.

The Lord promising to be with them. The astonishing revelations from chapter 2 from inside Jericho. They hear that the people are melting away in fear. We hear about the crossing of the Jordan. Miraculous.

[22 : 21] Amazing. And then the victory over Jericho. What a few weeks for Joshua and the people. God has been with them just as he promised. He was demonstrating that in amazing ways.

But now this. Defeat by Ai. Joshua is perplexed. What's perplexed? What's going on? And so he brings his perplexity to the Lord in prayer.

And these words we read about here verses 6, 7, 8, 9. These aren't words of unbelief but despair. How has this happened? Why? Joshua does not have the insight that we do.

We know verse 1 exactly what's going on. We know what Achan has done. We know the Lord's anger burns but Joshua doesn't know that yet. He's oblivious to the reality of what Achan has done. But Joshua's response here is the right one, isn't it?

To pray to God. To seek his help. To seek protection both of ourselves and his honour and his glory. Perhaps Joshua should have realised more quickly what was at the root of what was going on here.

[23 : 33] Perhaps he should have been quicker to think maybe there's some serious issue of sin within the people of God here. but I don't think we are here meant to be beating Joshua up for not getting things quicker.

His instinct to pray to God to bear his soul before the almighty God is the right one. But he's perplexed. And amid this perplexity God brings clarity.

Verses 10 to 15 God exposes Achan's sin. And it is a devastating revelation. Because God reveals the shocking reality the very thing that the law prohibited.

The very thing that Joshua instructed the people in chapter 6 not to do they have done. Look at verse 11. Israel has sinned. They have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them.

They have taken some of the devoted things. The problem was not poor military strategy. The problem was sin. And it's laid out in precise detail here.

[24 : 42] The Lord saw it all didn't he? Achan perhaps thought he was on to a winner. Not only did he get to take part in the destruction of the enemy but he was going to keep some of the spoils as well.

But the reality was he stole from God. He lied. He tried to hide it. Wanting to seem like he was on board with the whole thing just another Israelite soldier who did his duty.

He sought to deceive by hiding the plunder. But his deception would not deceive everyone. You see God cannot be deceived. Even the most well planned well executed well hidden treachery won't fool the almighty God of heaven.

He will not be deceived. Sure Achan had deceived his fellow Israelites for a while. He deceived Joshua but not so the Lord.

and then we read these terrifying words frightening words for Joshua to hear. Look at verse 12. End of verse 12.

[25 : 55] I will be with you no more unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. Nothing is more crucial for the people of God than the presence of God.

And here it is being threatened to be removed. I will be with you no more. The very thing that has been the absolute bedrock of Joshua's conquest is about to be withdrawn.

When God is present with his people they triumph even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. and when he withdraws because of the sin of his people they manage to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

It should have been a straightforward victory over Ai but somehow the defeat is. God's presence with his people is everything and now he threatens to withdraw from them.

That is devastating. But even in the revelation of his wrath there is still the desire for restoration. Look at verse 12 again.

[27 : 07] I will be with you no more unless unless there is a way back. And the Lord then sets out verses 13 to 15 how Joshua is to go about removing the devoted things from Israel.

He sets out what he needs to do and we see that happening from verses 16 to 26. God's anger is turned away as Achan is punished.

The path to restoration for the people of Israel lay in the destruction of Achan his family all his property and that seems to us unbelievably harsh doesn't it?

We read passages like this with our hands over our eyes. It's not comfortable reading is it? But we need to read this carefully. Look at verse 15 where God sets out what Joshua was to do with Achan.

Look at verse 15. 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.

[28 : 20] The penalty is devastating because the sin is devastating. And our failure to grasp the gravity is a failure to grasp the gravity of the nature of Achan's sin because mankind always underestimates the nature of sin.

We always underestimate the seriousness of it. And so it is here. That's just a nice cloak he took. It was just a bit of gold and silver.

What's the harm? Nobody was hurt. What's the problem? Well the problem was he had ignored deliberately willfully disobeyed the clear command of God.

Achan would have heard Joshua's announcement in chapter 6. Why else would he have gone to the trouble of hiding it under his tent? He knew he shouldn't have taken it.

But he underestimated the seriousness of breaking covenant with the Lord of all the universe. And so the penalty is serious. The sin that has brought calamity to Israel it must be removed.

[29 : 36] And only once it's removed once it's cleansed is God's anger turned away. Only then will God be able to dwell amongst his people again to be with them to deliver the city of Ai to them which he does in chapter 8.

And for those generations down the line who would read this account it would have made for them a jarring jolting sobering read don't you think? It was meant to warn. And for every reader of this chapter there can only be one conclusion God's anger burns against sin and even his own people are no exception.

Sin left unchecked within the people of God is devastating. God will not be deceived. No sin is really hidden in the end.

It's a very sobering chapter. And I want to draw out four implications for us as we think about how this applies to us today.

It's a passage that hits us right between the eyes. It's a shocking story. It's very sobering. So here's four things to think about. Number one, God takes sin seriously.

[30 : 55] God takes sin seriously. There can be no doubt whatsoever about God's settled consistent fierce opposition to sin. He takes it very seriously indeed.

God hates sin. It is an affront to him, an affront to his holiness, to his goodness, to his mercy. It was his opposition to the sin of Canaan that led to the destruction of the city of Jericho.

And God is not just opposed to sin out there. This account, Joshua 7, is about sin within God's people. And so for us today, those who are part of the visible people of God, there can be no immunity from God's fierce anger against sin, against presumptuous sin like this, where we think, I can do what I like.

The only safe place to be is sheltering under the refuge of Christ's cross. As we acknowledge our sin, repent of it, fling ourselves upon him for mercy. You can't point to your membership of a church as a defense.

You can't lean on your heritage. No, God takes sin seriously no matter where it's found. And so we must examine our own hearts, our own lives.

[32 : 23] Am I living in persistent, presumptuous sin like this? Am I consciously transgressing God's law? God takes sin seriously, be in no doubt about that.

Implication two, individual sin affects the whole church. Not only do we see God's settled opposition to sin, his burning anger against it, but we also see sin's devastating consequences for the whole church.

We noticed earlier that although Achan was one man, the whole of Israel is infected, verse one. Notice how the Lord describes what has happened. Look at verse 11.

Israel has sinned. They have transgressed my covenant. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen. They, they, they. It was Achan on his own who did it, but from law's perspective, they have done it.

individual sin affects the corporate body. No matter how secretive that sin might be, no matter how harmless we think it might be, sin always has corporate implications.

[33 : 42] Imagine a ship on the sea goes down in a storm. Fortunately, the crew have got into the rescue boat.

They've escaped on the lifeboat and suddenly one of them grabs a saw and starts cutting a hole beneath his seat on the lifeboat. Naturally, everybody else on the boat is shouting, what are you doing?

Stop! But the man replies, what's I got to do with you? I'm only sawing under my own seat after all. Well, Achan was the man with that saw.

The whole nation would sink with him if he kept at it. Achan surely thought no harm would come. What does it matter? It's just a coat and some gold.

But the devastating reality is that sin, serious, presumptuous sin like this, always infects the whole body. And that's a very sobering warning to all of us, isn't it?

[34 : 46] You may well think, what harm can come from this private sin of mine? It's not hurting anybody. Not so. Not so. And realizing that, realizing that what you are doing might well impact the church family, that may be the very thing that pulls you back from going any further.

Knowing that it could ruin a church may just be the thing to enable you to say no, I'm not doing this. Your private sins are not just private.

There will be implications for the church. A senior minister of a church in another country told me about a major church building project they were undertaking, huge building projects, very expensive, all had gone very smoothly.

And just in the final weeks of the building projects, there were massive, unexplained failures in the building. The project manager could not explain it. Nobody could explain how this had happened. It was utterly bizarre. The very next week, it emerged that one of the associate ministers had been engaged in multiple long-term affairs within the church.

[36 : 09] Devastating. And the senior minister said, he said to me, now I can't prove it, but I feel sure that the major issues we face with our building were in some way connected to this hidden, presumptuous, devastating sin in the life of this individual.

I can't prove it, but I'm sure. Now, that's just one example. I'm sure you can think of something as your own experience, where someone's private sin has really devastated a church.

And hearing that story from that senior minister reminded me of Aiken. A failure to take sin seriously in the lives of individuals will in the end prove catastrophic in a church.

And that is why a church that exercises church discipline is a church to be cherished. Church leaders that tackle sin in the lives of the flock, that is a healthy sign.

Good leaders tackle sin, even though it's messy, because individual sin affects the whole church. That's the second implication. Number three, God will expose hidden sins.

[37 : 28] Aiken hid his sin, at least he attempted to, but God knew and God exposed him. and this will be the case for all of us in the end.

No sin will in the end remain hidden. And we might well be able to fool those around us, those who lead the church, perhaps even your own family, perhaps you've even fooled yourself.

But in the end, God will expose every sin, even hidden sins. we can't hide forever, and it's likely that in this life, and certainly in the next, the truth will come to light.

In the end, each one of us will stand before the sovereign creator of the universe. All of us will have to give an account in the end.

Sin is always exposed. There's a very stark, shocking parallel to this story in the New Testament, in the early days of the church, Ananias and Sapphira, Acts chapter 5.

[38 : 32] They sought to deceive the church, and they thought their deception, their sin, would remain hidden. You remember, they sold a field, and they gave, so they said, all the profits to the church, when in reality, they kept some of it back.

They hid the truth, but they were exposed. God was not going to be deceived, and God is not deceived today.

The Lord Jesus in Luke 12 says that nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden, that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the rooftops.

One day, everything will be exposed, and it's God who will do the exposing. that is the truth. And no matter how successfully you might hide from others, we will in the end be exposed by our judge on the last day.

So be in no doubt, God will expose. Here's the fourth thing, final implication. At crucial moments in the church's life, the devil will seek a foothold.

[39 : 51] sin within the church is, as we've seen, a great threat, and is the enemy's most effective tactic. Sin is never just a private matter, but has implications for the whole.

That is why the enemy wields it as a weapon. It is so effective, which is why he will deploy it at crucial moments. In Joshua, this is a crucial moment.

The first battle into Canaan has been won. It's a crucial moment of momentum. Likewise in Acts. It was the early stages of the church's growth.

Things were growing quickly. Enter Ananias and Sapphira. Crucial moments. The crucial moments in the church's life and growth. The devil will seek a foothold.

So be aware. Do not be surprised when there are key moments forward in the life of church and things like this crop up.

[40 : 49] Don't be surprised. So will you carefully examine and guard your own hearts and motivations? So many opportunities to seek and serve self.

So many avenues down which we could cause havoc. Will you guard yourself? Will you pray for the leaders of the church that they would guard their own lives and hearts?

Sin like this in a church is dangerous. perhaps there is a particular hidden sin in your own life that you need to repent of.

Maybe you felt the heat of God's word tonight. Well, there is hope. There's hope for you, there's hope for all of us.

the very place where Achan was stoned. Look at the very end there. The Valley of Achor.

[41 : 54] It literally means a valley of trouble. And it marks a low point in Israel's history. But the Valley of Achor reappears later on in the book of Hosea.

A book about the people of Israel who have yet again been disobedient to the Lord. They wandered away. Hosea speaks of God's judgment upon them for their sin.

And yet, even then there is still hope. Listen to this from the book of Hosea. Therefore, says the Lord, I will allure her.

That is God's people. I will allure God's people and bring them into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. Achor, once a place of desolation, of shame, the Lord will turn into a door of hope. Sin does not have to be the last word in the human situation because God delights in mercy.

[43 : 11] In overflowing anger, for a moment I hid my face from you, says the Lord, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you. That is the nature of our God.

There is yet forgiveness that you may know grace, that Achan in this moment did not receive. If you would but see the door marked out with the name of Jesus Christ, because it was upon him that the Lord's wrath was spent.

His anger, his burning anger was poured out on Christ on the cross, that you might walk through that door of hope, out of the valley of trouble, out of the valley of Achor, and into an everlasting future with him, to the light, to hope.

So if that's you tonight, if you know I've erred terribly, there is hope, there is hope for you. Well, let's pray, shall we, and then we'll come to the table.

our heavenly father, these are sobering words, and they cause us to tremble, as we see again the reality of human nature, and of sin, and of your right anger against it.

[44 : 50] So Lord, forgive us if we think we can hide away from you. Forgive us for our presumption that we can live just as we think we can, that we can do what we just want to do.

And Lord, if we need to repent and turn to you, help us to do that, knowing that you are a God rich in mercy, abundant in steadfast love, knowing that you will not turn any away, who come to you seeking forgiveness.

So help us to do that. And we thank you that above all, you are a God of mercy and love, as well as justice. So help us, Lord, to respond, not in fear, but in faith.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.