

Joshua: God Keeps His Promises
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Fall 2022
Pastor David Palmer
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TEXT: Joshua 7:1-21



We learn great lessons from our victories, but sometimes we learn even more from our defeats and our failures. This morning we continue in our series on *Joshua: God Keeps His Promises*. We see this morning, Beloved, that sin is not a solitary activity, that sin actually hurts the people around us. We see that sin is life-threatening, and we see that it puts us in great, great danger. This passage begins with a narrative heading in Joshua 7:1. It's a narrative heading that tells us, as readers, something that the characters in the story don't yet know. Sometimes when you're reading the Bible, God lets you in on a perspective of the situation, and that's what happens here. Beginning in verse one, we read, we hear, before the characters in this chapter learn of it, that the people broke faith. There's been a breach of trust, an act of disloyalty in regard to devoted things, things that have been set apart for God. We are told as readers that Achan took some of the devoted things, and the anger of the Lord was provoked. Beloved, this chapter this morning is a serious chapter. It's a warning chapter. It's a chapter that that we all need. If you and I were writing the Bible just as an inspirational poem, we wouldn't include this chapter. But we need this chapter. We need this chapter because this chapter helps us to see, feel, understand the gravity of sin, what it means to disobey God, what it means to actually turn your back on God, and how deadly that can be, not just for you, but for the people around you. I need that, and I think you need that, too.

The text says they broke faith—a breach of trust. The Hebrew expression is *ma'al*. It has a cognate accusative, a corresponding noun that goes with it. The text says that Israel *ma'al*-ed a *ma'al*. A *ma'al* is something that you don't want to do. The action of *ma'al* is an act of betrayal.

It's to be unfaithful. It's to act with disloyalty. It's to take hold violently of something that belongs to God and make it for yourself. A *ma'al* is to violate something that's holy. It has as consequence to provoke God's anger and to put us in a situation of great danger. When we turn our back on God, it threatens not just our own life, but the lives of the people around us.

You can see in many different translations that various English versions wrestle with how to bring this expression forward. The King James says that Israel *"committed a trespass,"* stepped over the line, if you will. The New American Standard says that Israel *"acted unfaithfully."* The New English translation says they *"disobeyed the command."* The New Living translation says they *"violated the instructions."* The NRSV says they *"broke faith."* The NIV says they were *"unfaithful."* This variety of expressions reveals to us upfront that there's something hidden that will become known. The discovery of this sin proves to be profoundly instructive for all of us this morning. We know as readers that there's been a great disloyalty in the camp.

The narrative starts to unfold and narrates for us the battle of Ai. Fresh on the heels of success at Jericho, Joshua prepares to go up and take possession of the city of Ai. Ai is in the hill country, and he's moving westward after the defeat of Jericho to take possession of the central ridge of the land. Joshua follows a similar plan as in the battle of Jericho, and he sends spies to assess the situation. The spies return with a positive report. They come back with confidence and optimism. They say, "Don't have everyone go up to the battle of Ai, just 2,000 or 3,000 men. The people of Ai are few in number. Don't wear out the whole camp." So Joshua sends just 3,000 men. But this battle, unlike the battle of Jericho, is a disaster. The battle turns against us. The people flee. Israel is defeated. Thirty-six men—loved fathers, uncles, husbands—die. At the end of the defeat, we are chased away from the city, and our hearts melt within us. That's the same language that is used for the Canaanites. We have become like them in this way. Our hearts melt. Our strength vanishes.

What is your reaction when things go badly? What happens when things seem to come off the rails? Do you just press harder in the same direction, or do you do what Joshua and the elders do? In Joshua 7:6, we read:

"Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads."

After the disaster of this battle, Joshua tears his clothes in a posture of lament. He falls face down toward the earth, and the elders join him. The leaders of the community, in a posture of lament, put dust on their heads. In Joshua 7:7-9, Joshua cries out to God:

"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?"

Joshua's prayer ends with the petition, "O Lord, what will You do for the sake of Your great name?" Joshua, in a posture of lament, in a posture of confession, in a posture of prayer, is face down. Can you imagine seeing the pastor and the elders face down? You come out of your tent and we're all face down, dust on our heads. Something is terribly wrong.

The Lord's response to Joshua is direct and clear, and it is an act of mercy when God is direct and clear, isn't it? In Joshua 7:10, God says to Joshua:

"Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?"

The Lord diagnoses and explains. The sin which is hidden to the community is now made known to Joshua. In Joshua 7:11, God says:

"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."

Six verbs. Sin has a way of piling up, doesn't it? An ancient rabbi, Ben Azzai, said that the reward of sin is the temptation to sin again. When you open that door to sin, it is hard to close it. When we tolerate just a little idolatry in our lives, it doesn't stay inside of its bounds. When we are willing to yield territory to the enemy and allow a portion of our affections and thoughts to be dictated by something other than the Word of God and the will of God, it has a way of growing.

The people have sinned, transgressed, taken, stolen, lied, placed devoted things among their own belongings. Now, Beloved, we have an aversion even to the word "sin." I know it's kind of an uncomfortable word. It's a word that we don't use as much today, and yet the Scriptures use it often. Sin is missing the mark, missing the target. Transgression is overstepping the boundary. Sin is serious, though, in the Bible, and its seriousness is on full display in Joshua 7:12. The consequence of sin is that we are unable to stand before our enemies. The consequence of sin is that we turn our backs from before them, and the most devastating consequence of sin in verse 12, is that we have become like the Canaanites. God says in Joshua 7:12:

"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."

We have become like an object devoted to destruction. Maybe the most painful word of all is the Lord saying to Joshua, "I will be with you no more." You see, sin and a holy God can't share

the same space. It's really one or the other, and that's why sin is so toxic and so deadly. It's to be feared rightly and to be banished. God says, *"I will be with you no more unless you destroy the devoted things from among you."*

Sin is taking for myself what belongs to God. Sin is claiming an area of my life where I set the rules for the space. Sin is dangerous because it separates us from the covenant bond with the Lord as our husband. He tolerates no rivals. His instruction and His remedy is in Joshua 7:13:

"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.'"

His instruction is for us to consecrate ourselves. To consecrate ourselves means to take our lives, our whole lives, and move them back into the space that's holy. That means to take all of me and put it back where it belongs, as belonging to God. To do that means getting rid of the thing that is in my life, that's taken hold of my life, that keeps me autonomous. If we don't do that, the warning of Joshua 7, and that's repeated throughout the Scriptures, is that if we let sin take root in our lives, the ending of that is our destruction.

I remember touring a factory as a boy with my father who worked for General Motors. It was a dramatic factory visit, a "bring your son to work" day. I remember the excitement of seeing all these conveyor belts moving parts of cars and the excitement of seeing molten metal poured into a vat and then seeing robotic arms come, stamp that molten metal, and shoot out a car door. This is awesome. Nothing like this happens at my school. Then I remember my father coming around one area, and there was a big red button on this machine. I don't know why, but I imagine, like you and like me as a young boy, seeing that big red button, I thought, "I want to push that button." My father looked at me, and I think he could read my mind, and he said, "This factory floor is not a place for button pushers." Then he walked me through the deadly consequences that would happen for the workers if I pushed that button. I remember that and the impression it made.

When I was in graduate school, I had a close friend. We both met our wives at a similar time. He tolerated a sin in his life, and it started to grow in him. It started as a private, hidden thing, but it grew, and it took a little more of him year-by-year until, all of a sudden, his marriage was in trouble. He went to see his pastor. I knew his pastor and had deep respect for him, and I have great respect for the counsel that the pastor gave to my friend. The pastor said to him, "You have to destroy this, and if you don't destroy this, it will destroy you." There was no fluffy word. It was the truth. This is going to kill you if you don't get rid of it. Sadly, my friend did not, and it

took over more and more of his life until he lost his marriage, and he lost his family, and he finally lost his life. Consecrate yourselves to God. Get rid of that part of you that you're claiming for yourself.

The Lord instructs Joshua to bring the people forward by tribes, then clans, families, households, and then man by man. Joshua carries out these instructions, and he brings forward the tribes representatively. The Lord indicates, probably by the Urim and the Thummim, instruments that are inside the high priest's breast piece, the tribe of Judah. The narrative tension and suspense rise as the clans of Judah come forward representatively, and the clan of the Zerahites is selected. Finally, the clan of the Zerahites is brought forward representatively, and Zabdi is selected. Then his family, his household, is brought forward man by man, and Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, is taken. This one man among a large group of us (remember there are 600,000 families) is identified, and Joshua says to him in Joshua 7:19:

"My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to Him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."

Sin makes us hide, doesn't it? It pushes us into the shadows and then into the darkness. Achan has been hiding this whole time. In Joshua 7:20-21, Achan said:

"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 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

Achan had seen the spoil of Jericho, that great battle where God won the victory with a call to worship, the battle where God had instructed that all of the spoils, the plunder, were to be dedicated to God, to be used in the sanctuary. But, among the plunder of Jericho, Achan saw *"one beautiful garment, a cloak from Shinar."* Many translations render this as "a cloak from Babylon," and this is one of those small details that let us know the Bible is trustworthy. "Shinar" is a word that's used for Babylon only from the 16th to the 13th centuries, and you know from the use of this word that the book of Joshua is a very ancient book. Garments from Babylon were known in antiquity. They were known for trade in woolen garments, embellished with embroidered trim known as *birmu*. The trim around the mantle was of an extraordinary quality, dyed in rich and costly hues, and often times would have precious metals sewn into the fabric. Achan said, "I saw a beautiful suit, and I wanted it." And he saw 200 shekels of silver, which is six pounds of silver, 50 shekels of gold, about one pound of gold. Clothes bring us status. Clothes bring us importance, significance, honor. Silver and gold make us think we are



important and valuable. He sees among the plunder an attractive garment, six pounds of silver, and a pound of gold, and he coveted them. He said in his soul, "What belongs to God, I want for myself."

Beloved, that is deadly. That will kill you. When you see what belongs to God and you say, "It belongs to God, and I want it," that's going to kill you and the people around you. When you say that this part of my life is lived, not according to God's will, but by my desires, it's going to kill you. Maybe not that day, maybe not that month, but it will destroy you, because it will shatter the covenant bond. It's the 10th of the Ten Commandments: Do not covet. Achan says, "I saw those things, and I coveted them." He took them, and he hid them in his tent. Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent and discovered the devoted things there. They brought the devoted things, and they laid them before the Lord. Then, in the saddest scene in the book of Joshua, Achan and his family are stoned. The devoted things are dedicated to God, and they are destroyed in the valley, which they name for this incident, the Valley of Achor, which means the Valley of Trouble. Achan and his family are destroyed, and the Israelite has become the Canaanite. That's what the narrative actually wants you to see. The contrast between what happens with Achan and what happens with Rehab is striking and complete. Rehab hides the spies. Achan hides the devoted things. Rehab's faithfulness saves her entire family, and Achan's unfaithfulness destroys his. Rehab becomes part of Israel and lives among them forever, and Achan becomes part of Canaan. His grave is marked with stones in a valley named Trouble.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:11, writing to a young growing church, "*These things happened to them,*" speaking of Israel's experience in the wilderness and entering the land. These things happened to them *typologically, or as an example, and they were written down for our instruction.* God's instruction for us, Beloved, is profound and poignant this morning. We need this chapter; I need this chapter. Let me just preach to myself for a minute. I need this chapter because sin is not private; it's public. Sin is not cheap; it's costly. Sin is not about me; it's about the people around me, people I love. If you sin against the Lord, Beloved, don't treat it lightly. I want you to exercise a holy intolerance. Can we embrace that? Tolerance is usually a good thing, except when it's tolerating sin. I want to have a holy intolerance in my soul. When I'm tempted to claim a part of my life and to say, "This part belongs to me," I want to have a holy intolerance. When I'm tempted to see the things of this world and think, "That's the key to my happiness—a silver cloak, a pile of silver, a bar of gold. That's what I need for my significance." I want to exercise a holy intolerance of that. Instead, I want to devote myself, and I want you to devote yourself, your family, and yourselves to God—all of you. You will see garments that look attractive. You will see the fabric of this world, and it will strike you as good, as necessary, as essential for your happiness. But, Beloved, this morning I want to urge you that the garment that you must have is not available in this world. The garment that you must have for happiness

and significance is a garment that is found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus told a parable about a wedding. Everyone who was initially invited to the wedding gave lame reasons why they couldn't come. So the king, who is giving the wedding for his son, told the servants to go to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as they find. The servants went to the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. The king came in to look at the guests, and he saw a man at the wedding without a wedding garment. He lacked the garment that we must have. The king said, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" He was speechless, and the king said, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." What is the wedding garment that we must have, and where can it be found? Beloved, it is not sold in Babylon. It's not woven with fine embroidered cloth. The garment that you must have is a garment of fine linen. It is the garment that Paul describes in Galatians 3:27:

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

What is the garment that you must have? It is not the Babylonian cloak. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that clothes us like a garment. When you wrap yourself in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, you have forgiveness of sins. You have everlasting life. You have hope that is secure and can never be taken away. The things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and His grace. You will see the Babylonian cloak, and you will say: "I have no need of the Babylonian garment. It is unappealing and unattractive to me. Devoted to the Lord, I am clothed with the righteousness of Christ." Beloved, that is the garment that you must have, and it is a garment that is available to you only through faith in Jesus Christ. All the silver and the gold of this world cannot grant you significance or salvation. Achan destroyed his life and his family for six pounds of silver and a pound of gold. In 1 Peter 1:18-19, Peter says:

"You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

Let me tell you what's truly valuable. It's not silver; it's not gold. The most valuable substance in the cosmos is the atoning blood of Christ. That is what we must have. We must have the precious blood of Jesus Christ, washing our sin away.

Beloved, I ask you this morning: What is hidden in your tent? What are you hiding in your tent? With every shovel of earth removed, Achan rejected the conviction of sin. With every shovel, he further sealed his ownership. With every shovel of earth to cover, he hardens his heart. Are we hiding things in our tent? Society around you, society around me, will teach us, it will disciple us to covet and then cover. Are we coveting beautiful cloaks from Babylon and discipling others to

do the same? Are we coveting the cloaks of Babylon, the silver, and the gold in our work, in our schools, in our aspirations, in our families, in our hopes for our children? Is not the fine linen enough? Is not the fine linen of the righteousness of Christ enough? Are we coveting fool's gold and the empty promises of this world? Are we trusting in a present evil age, or are we on pilgrimage to Zion? Are we on pilgrimage to a holy city?

The Bible ends with a holy city coming down from heaven. As you imagine us walking toward the city, we walk toward the city, clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Imagine for a moment someone walking toward the holy city hiding under his garment a Babylonian cloak, silver and gold of this world, and attempting to enter the city. As we come to God's presence, there can be nothing hidden in our tent. We have to have a holy intolerance of sin. Sin is deadly, and we know it. We know it when we commit it, but we also know it when we suffer the consequences of it from people around us. Sin wants to be hidden, but sin can be brought to light in Christ. It can be confessed in Christ, and it can be atoned for and forgiven. We can trade out the Babylonian cloak for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We can stand before Him, blameless with great joy, no fear, and we can know that our significance is found not in silver or gold, but in having our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Lord Jesus, shine Your light into the dark places in me, in us. Lord Jesus, illuminate our path with the radiance of Your splendor. Lord Jesus, remove everything false, dishonest, disgraceful in me. Lord Jesus, bind me to Yourself in covenant forever and clothe me, clothe us, with the wedding garment of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Redeem my life with the infinitely precious blood of our Savior, Jesus. Lord Jesus, You are the Joshua who is to come, and we find salvation in You and in You alone. O Lord, help us not to fall in love with this world, but to fall in love with You. Forgive us, Lord, where we have been tricked, deceived, by what our eyes see, where we sought significance in silver, gold, or the Babylonian cloak. We felt, Lord, the consequence, the rising power and grip of sin in the shadows, in the darkness, and we ask You, Lord, to shine Your light. We confess our sin before You, and we take You at Your word that You are faithful to forgive. So, Lord, we come. We come to You, seeking to be clothed with Your righteousness right now.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.