

I am going to have Dr. J Vernon McGee introduce our passage today. In his commentary for it... he writes:

The worst enemy that you have is yourself. ... He occupies the same skin that you occupy. ... He uses the same brain that you use in thinking his destructive thoughts. ... He uses the same hands that you use to perform his own deeds. ... This enemy can do you more harm than anyone else. ... He is the greatest handicap that you have in your daily Christian life.

There are two factors that make dealing with this enemy doubly difficult. ... In the first place... we are reluctant to recognize and identify him. ... We have strong aversion to label him as an enemy. ... And the fact of the matter is most of us rather like him. ... The second problem is that he is on the inside of us. ... If he would only come out and fight like a man... it would be different... but he will not. ... It is not because he is a coward... but because he can fight better from his position within.

Just stop and consider with me this entire concept of “an enemy within.” ... Entire nations... churches... and individuals... have been utterly destroyed by the enemy within. ... Russia fell to the Communists... not because of the German pressure on the outside... but because of the socialist doctrine fomenting on the inside. ... Many of us happen to believe that the same is happening to America today.

Whether it is based on fact... or is pure mythology... perhaps we have all heard the story of the Trojan horse. ... The city of Troy had held off the other Greek city-states for ten long... weary years. ... Finally the Greeks

sailed away leaving a wooden horse. ... The Trojans took that wooden horse within their gates... and that was the undoing and destruction of Troy.

In a similar way churches are wrecked from within... not from forces that are on the outside. ... To the early church... we have these words of warning to the church:

**Revelation 2:14-15 (ESV)**

*But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*

**Revelation 2:20 (ESV)**

*But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.*

Such disloyalty... rebellion... disobedience... sensuality... and unfaithfulness in the church today... is hurting God's cause more than any influence that is on the outside. ... The most damage to be done to our churches... will always come from the inside... not from the outside.

But it isn't simply nations and churches that find their demise from the enemy within. ... An individual can be destroyed from the inside.

Alexander the Great was probably the greatest military genius who has moved armies across the pages of history. ... There has been no one like him. ... Before the age of thirty-five... he had conquered the world... but he

died a drunkard. ... He had conquered the world... but he could not conquer Alexander the Great. ... There was an enemy within that destroyed him.

We have been studying the Book of Joshua here on Sunday mornings. Last week we saw how God led the Israelites to victory over Jericho... and we learned some valuable lessons about a faith that conquers an outside enemy.

Today we will learn how to conquer the enemy within. ... The only battle that the children of Israel lost in taking the Promised Land... was a battle in which the defeat came... not from without... but from within.

.....

There is a short step between a great victory and a great defeat. ...The trip from the mountain peak... to the valley floor... is a quick trip off the cliff.

Everything has been going great! ... Israel was victorious. Jericho has fallen and God's people were undefeated 1-0. ... But a rapid turn around of events is about to take place ...The little town of Ai is going to defeat Israel.

God's people were about to learn that only a steady hand can carry a full cup. ... They are about to learn that heights can be dangerous places. The pattern that we saw in Elijah's life is the same pattern in this chapter.

- On Mt. Carmel in Victory (1 Kings 19)
- At Horeb... he was defeated, discouraged, in despair, and wants to die.

Have you ever been on this roller coaster? ... You go from victory and joy to defeat and despair.

The land of Canaan was there. ... God had told them that it was theirs. God was saying to them, "*It is yours, go in, possess, and enjoy that which you take.*" ... But a simple-looking battle... brought them devastating defeat.

What a lesson that is for us today. ... In Joshua 7... the defeat at Ai... and in Joshua 8... their eventual victory at Ai... represent the flesh in the believer. ... Today we will see the sin of Achan within the camp. ... We will see how harmful ... just one person's sin... can be to an entire society of God's people. I pray that God will impress on each and every one of us... the seriousness of our own personal sin... and the serious measures we need to take against it.

Now let us look at the text.

### **Josh. 7:1**

This verse tells us that the *children of Israel* committed a trespass... but it was one man... Achan, who committed the sin. The whole nation had to suffer because of what Achan did.

You know... If the church is failing... and is in a state of apostasy (and it is)... then you and I are implicated in it as members of the church. ...

### **1 Corinthians 12:26 (ESV)**

*If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

### **Josh. 7:2-3**

Joshua is unaware of a problem among his people. ... He is unaware that fellowship has been broken with the Lord and the Lord has withheld His

blessings. ... He is still on the mountain top enjoying the victory over Jericho. ...Joshua is about to learn that yesterday's victory does not make believers immune from defeat today.

(LISTEN) ... Living in the past can bring defeat in the present. A daily walk with God is needed for consistency and spiritual growth in our lives.

Jericho represented the enemy on the outside – the world. But Ai represents a different kind of enemy. It is the enemy on the inside - our flesh.

Some believers are marching around their worldly Jericho... blowing trumpets... as they talk about how walls have come down around them. ... The world is completely defeated to them... "*That battle has been won...*" they declare. They no longer drink... or smoke... or use foul language... or live a loose lifestyle. However... they are as negative as anyone could be... as they announce... "*We don't do this, and we don't do that.*" ... They have overcome the world.

But what about the flesh...? ... Some of the most dangerous people in any church are the super- saints... who blow their horns about having overcome their Jericho... the world. ... But... do you know what...? Often... they are defeated at Ai.

What do I mean...? ... They may have some victory with the world – outside influences... but there is yet another enemy. ... The flesh (an inner influence, often manifesting itself as pride) still wreaks havoc with many conquerors of world forces. They think they are living the Christian life. ... In fact... they often boast about living the victorious life... without even

knowing how their inner enemy is raging. ... The victorious life is Christ's full reign in us. ... He is the One who gets the victory and not us.

The children of Israel were in the flush of victory. They had overcome Jericho. ... Although it was God's victory... look how... in just a short time... Israel loses a major battle with the inner enemy – pride.

The spies return and basically say, "*No problem here. Take a few guys and we will rap this matter up! Two or three thousand is all we need!*" ... God's people had become *self-confident and self-reliant*. ... They were the epitomes of overconfidence. ... When we get into chapter 8... we will see that this was not God's strategy. God's instructions... later... will be for them to take their entire army. ... So this plan... that only called for a few... did not come from the Lord.

Now... stop and compare this to ourselves. ... The spies in their *overconfidence* underestimate the strength of the enemy... and overestimate their own strength and ability. ... They seem to have thought, "We are INVINCIBLE!" ... But their attitude made them VULNERABLE.

Their overconfidence led to presumption... which is a form of pride. They feel they don't need God's leading or help. ... How can we tell that they have this attitude? ... Well, they scouted the land and now are preparing to attack. ... But what is missing in the verses we have read so far...? ... The same procedure was used in chapter six... except for one important element.... prayer! ...They are about to fail because of their *prayerlessness*.

Are you still comparing yourself to them... in this...? ... Is it not true... that within us... our frequent overconfidence says.....

- *I don't need to pray about it.* (If Joshua had prayed, he would have realized there was a problem in the camp.)
- *I don't need to read the Bible each day or study God's Word.*
- *I don't need God's help.*
- *I don't need godly counsel.*
- *I'll do it my way.*
- *I don't need to give 100% or do my best. I'll just get by!*

After looking the city over carefully... no one even bothered to ask the True Commander of Israel's Army.

### **Josh. 7:4-5**

Israel was defeated by the men of Ai. ... Thirty-six righteous men were killed. ... Thirty-six fathers or sons would not return home that night. ... Three thousand men showed their backs to little Ai... and were chased to **Shebarim** (which means "*terror, broken.*") ... Prayerlessness and overconfidence lead them to a place of terror... brokenness... worry... and despair. ... The hearts of the people were melted or liquefied. ... ... When something takes liquid form it...

- Is Unstable
- Conforms to the shape it is contained or its surrounding circumstances.
- Means a *solid* object has become pulverized or shattered completely.

Does this ever describe you? ... Are you unstable in your Christian life because you have been trying to live it in your own strength...? ... Are you spiritually defeated or shattered? ... Maybe you sense that you too are trapped at Sherabim... the place of terror and brokenness?

Good News! ...The cause of your problem can lead to the cure. ... Put your confidence in Christ... and secondly... be a person of prayer and the Word. ... Jesus Christ gives stability... control... and peace in our circumstances. ... He can piece together that which has been shattered whether it is your life... your marriage... or your relationship with the Lord or another person.

Now the stress of this entire chapter (Joshua chapter 7)... seems to be the sin of Achan. At the beginning of this narrative... from verse 1... Achan's sin is central. ... Achan lost an inner battle... he confesses that he coveted.... However... because of what is presented in the opening verses... I think that God also wants us to see that Joshua and his leaders also lost an inner battle... and it was a pride-filled overconfidence...

Whenever you and I are careless with our inner battle with the flesh... we will also be defeated by outside forces of the world. ... And it is not just us who suffers... but the entire community of believers... with whom we are associated. Spiritual truth insists that our entire church suffers.

Our entire church will suffer every time... when we rely on our own skills... and strength... because the task before us seems "easy enough." ... Our entire church will suffer defeat... if we only go to God... when the obstacles seem too great for us to handle in our own strength.

(LISTEN) ... only God knows what lies ahead. ... Consulting Him... even when we have positive momentum and encouragements... when... perhaps we are on a winning streak... consulting the Lord at those times... as well... may save us from grave mistakes or misjudgments.



Our otherwise careless thinking... will surely lead to our defeat. ... The apostle Paul recognized his weakness when he said...

**Romans 7:18 (ESV)**

*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*

Have you found out... that you have no strength or power within yourself? You cannot live the Christian life... you will not have victory with your inner battles of the flesh... and God never asks you to.

(LISTEN!) ... God wants to live the Christian life through you. ... It is only when we are filled with the Holy Spirit of God that we can live the Christian life. ... The next time you are faced with an inner struggle... rather than lie to yourself... rather than boastfully think... "*I've got this... I'm OK...*" instead confess the fact that you are not... that you are completely dependent on the Lord. Confess any known sin... and ask for a fresh filling of God's Holy Spirit...

**Josh. 7:6-9**

The *magnified* leader is now *mortified*. This is the first military defeat in Canaan. The *gladness* of victory has been replaced by the *gloom* of defeat. ABC Sports would say, "*The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.*"

(Let's be careful to learn from this)... **If we will pray in victory, we will not have to plead in defeat.**

Joshua is upset needless to say. ... He speaks in anger, "*Did you bring us into Canaan to kill us? We should have stayed on the other side of Jordan, in the land of selfishness, carnality, and disobedience.*" ... Just like what

Israel had done in their wilderness wandering... Joshua blames God. In essence... he is saying that all their troubles are the result of obeying the Lord.

But... to believe that obedience to the Lord is the source of your problems... is an inaccurate assessment of your problems. ... People have a tendency to blame their problems on the wrong things... and ignore the true source of their trials. ... Thus... their problems never get solved.

Listen to what the Lord said. It is getting right down to the nitty-gritty.

### **Josh. 7:10**

God gets right to the point with Joshua! ...The problem was NOT with God... the problem was with Israel. ... The Lord rebukes Joshua and tells him... "*Get Up! There is sin in the camp!*" ... It was time to act! ... Sin compounds itself if it is not dealt with quickly.

Through Achan's sin... we should learn to never underestimate the amount of damage one person can do outside the will of God.

- Abraham's sin in Egypt almost cost him his wife. (Genesis 12)
- David's disobedience in the unauthorized census lead to the death of 70,000 people. (2 Samuel 24)
- Jonah ran from God's will and almost sank his ship.
- Here, Israel is achin because of Achan.

God says to Joshua, "*Get up off your face, and cut out all this whining in sackcloth and ashes.*" ... .. There are Christians who spend their prayer time whining before the Lord. ... It won't do any good. ... We need to get at the root of the problem.

## **Josh. 7:11**

Notice the pronoun "they" ... here in verse eleven. ... One person sinned and all were held responsible. ... Infection affects the whole body. This truth is taught in several places in the New Testament. ... Whether you like it or not... your life affects everyone else in the church. We affect and infect one another for good or for bad. ... The testimony of the church is reflected in the lives of every believer in the church.

Let me... very quickly... give you the breakdown of 1 Corinthians 5... which speaks to this... The Apostle Paul wrote...

- Verse 1—There is immorality in the church.
- Verse 2—There is nothing being done about it.
- Verse 5—You are to deliver the unrepentant one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit be saved.
- Verse 6—Sin affects the whole church. Leaven affects the whole lump.
- Verse 7—The sinner needs to be purged.
- Verse 9-11—There was to be a break in fellowship.
- Verse 13—They were to isolate or put away the wicked person.

If things in your life are not right with God... don't run from Him... get right with Him. ... Your sin affects your testimony and the cause of Christ!

## **Josh. 7:12**

You can't defeat your enemies till the sin is dealt with. God is in the business of using clean vessels..

## **Josh. 7:13-18**

I wonder if Achan got any sleep that night? ... Would you sleep? ...The next morning the search begins. ...It is determined the problem is in the tribe of Judah.... Next... the family of Zarhites... and then Zabdi is taken. ... Imagine the heartbeat of Achan as they get closer and closer to finding him.

Why didn't God simply tell Joshua who did it...? Why did He stretch it out like this...? ... There are four very good reasons... #1. This dramatic method would impress on the nation of Israel the seriousness of disobeying God's commands.

#2. I believe that God... in His grace and mercy... was giving Achan the opportunity to repent. ... If Achan would have repented and returned to God what belonged to Him... I believe he would have been pardoned. ... Achan had five opportunities to repent here... Unfortunately Achan refused.

#3. It showed Achan's lack of contriteness. ... It unquestionably displays the hardness of Achan's heart. ... He did not at once come forward and confess his crime... He had already seen the disaster he had brought upon Israel... yet he kept his mouth shut and clung to his stolen goods... He was not driven... by remorse for the injury he had done his brethren... or by the step-by-step process... which was clear evidence that God had found him out. None of it led to confession and restitution. He concealed his guilt till concealment was no longer possible."

The congregation needed to see how hard Achan's heart was in order to be aroused to execute the judgment God commanded. If the congregation had simply been told by Joshua who the sinner was... they might have had pity for Achan.

#4. It showed the failure of concealment. ... Another reason for the process of exposing was to show that you cannot conceal sin. ... It will be exposed sooner or later. ... Regardless of Achan's skill in covering sin... his sin was eventually exposed. ... He may have foolishly believed that he would not get caught. ... God demonstrates to us that we can't hide ourselves... or our sin... from a holy God.

But no one can hide from God. ...

**Amos 9:3 (ESV)**

*If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them; and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.*

**Ecclesiastes 12:14 (ESV)**

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

Achan was eventually forced to confess his evil. ... Being forced meant he was not repentant.

Now... concerning verse 15... I should address what is probably an elephant in the room. Does the severity of the punishment fit the crime...? Such severity will disturb some of us... but we must ask why the severe penalty?

Our problem here is... sinners that we are... we don't think breaking Yahweh's covenant is all that big a deal. ... We really cannot understand God's wrath... because sin does not bother us much. ... That's why we are mystified when we read passages like this... And that is why we cannot understand Jesus... when he tells us we should be willing to take extreme measures to avoid sin (in Matthew 5:29-30). It is baffling to us because we

do not share Jesus' alarm over sin. ... Truthfully... we cannot treat cancer with vitamin pills... it often requires radical surgery. ...We may think sin is not that big a deal... but that does not alter God's estimate.

### **Josh. 7:19-21**

Notice the steps of Achan's sin. He saw, he coveted, he took. The pattern has been the same for a number of men in the Scriptures and for you and me. **I saw, I coveted, I took.**

- Lot saw, coveted, and took Sodom's plains.
- Samson did the same with Delilah.
- David followed this pattern with Bathsheba.
- Eve saw, coveted, and took the forbidden fruit.
- Judas went down this path when he exchanged 30 pieces of silver for the life of Christ.

Achan said, "I SAW." Achan's first mistake was he looked and dwelt upon the spoil. This word "saw" means a concentrated beholding of the scene, not a casual glance.

Achan also said, "I COVETED." ... Achan was dissatisfied with the way God had ordered the affairs of his life. *"I have been deprived of the good things of life these many years in the wilderness. Here is a beautiful new and stylish garment and some silver and gold. How could God want to withhold these things from me? They will never be missed, and I am entitled to some pleasure and prosperity... I deserve this. I'm going to improve my situation and do my own thing."*... Are you suffering from the *Achan Syndrome*? ... Are you resentful of the way the Lord has ordered your life? Are you rebellious toward Bible principles of purity and have you

decided to do what you want to do... instead of what the Lord wants you to do?

Achan's dissatisfaction led to disobedience. ... He rebelled against God because he was dissatisfied with his position in God's world. Achan coveted that which was not his.... so then he took.

These are the steps of the sin of the flesh. Gossip, criticism, envy, and jealousy are all sins of the flesh. They cause strife and trouble. For instance, criticism builds up your ego. It calls attention to yourself. It makes you look better than the person you are criticizing. The old sin of the flesh sees, covets, and then takes.

Achan thought he could hide his sin... but he couldn't. Neither can we hide our disobedience. The Bible says in Numbers 32:23,

**Numbers 32:23 (ESV)**

*...and be sure your sin will find you out.*

That statement was issued to God's people, not heathens. God warned his people of the folly of not keeping their word, their promises, and fulfilling their responsibilities.

Achan's sin becomes even more odious when you stop to realize all that God had done for him. God had cared for him and his family in the wilderness. He had brought them safely across the Jordan and given the army victory at Jericho. The Lord had accepted Achan as a son of the covenant at Gilgal. Yet in spite of all these wonderful experiences, Achan disobeyed God just to possess some wealth that he couldn't even enjoy.

Had he waited just a day or two, he could have gathered all the spoils he wanted from the victory at Ai!

**Matthew 6:33 (ESV)**

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

For believers today... how are we going to overcome the flesh? ... We have to deal with sin in our lives. ... But what are we to do? ...

**1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

True confession does not deal in generalities. Spell it out... "I saw... I coveted...and I took. ... Tell God everything that is in your heart -- just open it up to Him. ... You might as well tell Him because He already knows all about it.

**Josh. 7:25-26**

Since a law in Israel prohibited innocent family members from being punished for the sins of their relatives... Achan's sons and daughters must have been guilty of assisting him in his sin.

**Deuteronomy 24:16 (ESV)**

*Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.*

Sin is a serious situation, and it is emphasized for believers in the New Testament.



**Romans 8:13 (ESV)**

*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

There are many Christians who are not living. Dwight L. Moody put it in this quaint way, "*People have just enough religion to make them miserable.*"

There are miserable saints because they do not deal with the sin in their lives. The apostle Paul said,

**1 Corinthians 11:31-32 (ESV)**

*But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

Please stop and consider with me what these two verses mean... If we don't judge ourselves... God has to step in and judge us... and His judgment is sometimes pretty serious. ... And it will do no good to complain and whine like Joshua did. ... The thing to do is to go to God and get the miserable thing straightened out. ... When we confess our sin to Him and turn from it... then we experience the joy of the Lord.

Israel went on from the Valley of Achor to conquer Ai. We'll see that in chapter 8. And then it took only seven short years to complete the conquest of Canaan. Continuing victory grew out of the difficult experience they had at Ai and then at Achor. What appeared to be a great disaster was a learning experience for the whole nation. In Hosea's words, it became a door of hope, a door of expectation. They entered into a renewed relationship with God.

The good news today is that we can experience the same thing if we're willing to let God put his finger on those areas of our life where we are

consciously resisting his will; and bring them out into the light, put them to death, repent of them, receive full forgiveness, and then go on in his power with hope for the future.