

Hidden Does Not Mean Private

Joshua 7

Introduction: Sometimes a little shock to the system goes a long ways, especially in those areas that we can easily loose awe and focus. I love standing by the water's edge at the beach with my girls and watch as they move from distant spectators (I don't want to go in) to fearless participants (daddy, let's go in further) within a matter of a few minutes. They will hold my hand as little waves wash over their knees, but their confidence grows to believe that they can stand on their own. That's usually when it happens, that one wave they did not see and certainly did not expect wipes their legs out from under them, throws them down into the water, and reminds them quickly that the ocean is not to be messed with (although it is to be enjoyed).

We need to be shocked sometimes by the holiness of God and our own sin. When we get too comfortable with either, problems ensue. In particular, we struggle with a certain type of sin: **hidden sin**. These are things that we commit in private, in the shadows, when we believe no one is watching and no one sees. It is what we do and who we are when we think we are all alone, in a world made by us and controlled by us. This has always been an issue but has been exasperated by the proliferation of social media and technology. Now we can create worlds for ourselves on a screen, put off a persona to others that we can control through text, and isolate ourselves from true, real, hard, and satisfying relationships. We get lulled into thinking that our sin is ours, and the consequences do not breach beyond the world we have created. But the truth is: **sin is neither personal nor private, and neither are the consequences**. We are tied into a family, a community of faith that ones personal sin effects the whole, and nothing is hidden from the omniscient gaze of God. Personal sin affects the whole community, and private sin is **always** known by God. At stake in all of this is the effectiveness of this community, the enjoyment of God Himself, and our fellowship with God and each other.

This is the essence of what we get in Joshua 7. It's a narrative that is shocking, that is intended to stun our senses and wake us up to the true reality of God. Israel had just come off a lopsided victory where they utterly destroyed a dynamic stronghold in Jericho. What should have taken months of time and cost thousands of lives was over in a matter of days. Now they were directed to take the much smaller city of Ai (pronounced "I", not A – I). By securing both cities Israel would control the hill country and an important East-West route, and could cut the land of Canaan in two, gaining control of the land on two fronts. Normal scouting went into the mission and the point men came back with a good report and arsenal of confidence: we should not send our entire force up the rocky terrain, but (in no small part) based on the fact that God is with us, let's only send 3000 men. That will be enough to finish the job. However, a devastating event happened next : DEFEAT. Dramatic, sound, and unexpected...

Joshua 7:4-5 So about 3,000 men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, ⁵ 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.**

What????!! What just happened? And maybe more importantly, why? Is God whimsical? He gives victory one minute and pulls the rug out the next? Have you ever felt this way, that you weren't sure what just happened, and surely can't figure out why? The narrative shows that **Joshua** surely could not figure it out. Joshua 7:6-9 has Joshua **tearing his clothes, putting dust on his head, and appealing to God in front of the Ark of the Covenant** (which symbolized God's presence). He appealed on the basis of God's name and His fame, and wondered out loud what just happened. God was going to fill Joshua

in on what we rarely get to see: **the reason for the defeat was the sin of someone in the camp!** This sin was not just any sin, it was **hidden sin that affected everyone, including the death of 36 soldiers.**

Hidden does not mean private. We want to take a look at the reasons behind, affects of, and hope for hidden sin, because hidden sin among us will not simply affect us individually, but will always hurt the whole.

I. **Hidden sin stirs God's anger (1)**

Joshua 7:1 *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.***

A. **Breaking faith**

God is ultimately and infinitely consistent and never does anything at random. He is consistent in regards to His holiness and response to sin. He made two things abundantly clear to the people of Israel as they started their invasion of the land:

- **They needed to consecrate themselves before God, because He would ultimately fight for them** – this was going to be a spiritual battle that played out in physical confrontation, but purity in their trust in God was imperative to success
- **God was going to give them beyond what they could imagine, but when He said devote certain things to Him, He meant it** – There were certain times God called the people to burn everything as a sacrifice to Him. He did this in Jericho because it was the firstfruits of conquering the land, so it was ALL given to God. The irony of Achan's sin: God was going to provide a massive amount of spoil in the next city (see Joshua 8:27). If Achan would have waited, he would have had MORE than he ever could have stolen.

B. **Corporate solidarity**

There is an amazingly counterintuitive statement made here. One man sinned by the name of Achan. One man, one moment, one act. Yet, God clearly held **ALL OF ISRAEL RESPONSIBLE**. In fact, He said it multiple times (v. 1, 11, 12). One man's sin held all of the people in contempt. This is not isolated to the OT either, as 1 Cor. 5 says the same thing about sin, that sin spreads from one to another like leaven in bread, affecting the whole. This is incredible for our thinking. We pride ourselves on individual faith, individual lives and homes, and keep things separate from others. In a community of believers, we are uniquely tied in together. This means that when one member suffers, we all do. When one experiences loss, or joy, or sorrow, we all do. God was reminding Israel that they were a nation, together following the Lord's lead. Yes, they had to live this out individually, but it was neither **personal nor private**. We must work to wipe away our false thinking that the community of the church is simply a gathering that is compartmentalized from the rest of life. This is a unique family that has been called together through the gospel and is united by the Holy Spirit.

Is this how you view each other? Do you hurt when others hurt? Do you care if others sin? We are in this together, and we must be wary how much of our lives are personal and private.

II. **Hidden sin brings dire consequences (2-15; 25)**

Joshua 7:10-13 The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?" ¹¹ **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. 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.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."

Joshua 7:25 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.**

A. Personal Loss

Hidden sin cannot stay hidden forever. God is gracious to allow hidden sin to come to the surface because there can be no joy in our salvation when we are riddled with hidden sin (see King David in 2 Samuel 11 and Psalm 51). In this case Achan's sin was exposed and it came at a huge amount of personal loss. God had told Joshua that whoever committed this sin would *"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"* (7:15). Achan's sin not only meant that he would lose **his life**, but his entire family would be wiped out, including his sons and daughters (7:24). Hidden sin destroys our life. We get caught into thinking that **we can** hide our sin (which is crazy since God always knows), but are unwilling to come clean with our sin because we have **improper fear and improper pride**. We fear what will happen to us if we are exposed and fearful of what people may think. Fear and pride keep sin hidden, and keep us bound by sin in a trap of misery. But hidden sin clearly does not only affect our own life, it affects those around us.

B. Public Cost

Achan's seemingly private sin of lying and stealing caused clear public consequences. Not only did 36 families lose their fathers, brothers, and sons, but God no longer was going to fight for the people, but instead turned His anger toward His people. Sin never stayed wrapped in tight little packages, locked away for personal consumption at our convenience. It is a viral disease that spreads like gangrene. My personal sin can affect God's blessing of the whole so it of vast importance that we deal individually with our sin for the health of the community.

Would this still happen today? This really is the issue we wrestle with. Does God deal this severely with sin today? Wasn't this simply one of those OT issues that seems brutal to us but happened in a time and land far away? The answer partially lies in the narrative in Acts 5 concerning the story of Ananias and Sapphira:

Acts 5:1-11; 14 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled **your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?**"⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**"⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much."⁹ But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.

When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ **And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things... And *more than ever* believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.**

The church had grown significantly at this point, but with growth comes growing pain. People were selling personal property to support those in the church and laying it at the feet of the apostles to distribute. Ananias and Sapphira brought some of what they sold and kept some back for themselves. The text says the issue was they **lied in their heart to the Lord, the Holy Spirit**. Because of this, they lost their lives. But as result, proper fear of the Lord was restored, purity was regained, and the church grew. It is not that God COULD NOT DO THIS TODAY, but His grace restrains Him from killing us today because of our sin. The correlation between purity and effectiveness is also seen in 2 Timothy

A pure church is an effective church:

2 Timothy 2:20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ Therefore, ***if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.***

Proper Fear of the Lord  Purity  Effectiveness

III. **Hidden sin grows by a clear progression (16-21)**

Joshua 7:20-21 And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: ²¹ 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."

A. **Unfolding of the progression**

All of Israel gathered together and the perpetrator was whittled down first by tribe, then clan, and finally household. It became clear through this process that Achan was the man responsible for the sin of Israel. Joshua asked him, *"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.**"* (v. 19) Joshua wanted to expose what was hidden so that it could be brought to light and be dealt with. Achan gave a clear explanation and thought process behind why he stole and hid the items, which were gold, silver, and a coat from Shinar, which would have been from Babylon (think something chic or European, a trendy piece of clothing that he couldn't wear about town anyway!). His description of sin is informative to our own heart:

- **He saw it** – This was the appeal to the lust of his eyes. He saw that these were good things, things that would make him happy, that would be helpful, and that wouldn't hurt anyone. To see something is not sinful, and if it had ended here, no harm would have been done. Much like David and Bathsheba, if David has seen her once and looked away, guarding his heart, all would not have been lost. But when we see and let sight move into desire, death pursues.
- **He coveted it** – This is where sin is bred. He allowed his sight to turn into lust, coveting something that was not his and in fact belonged to God alone. This is where David went wrong as well, allowing a look to linger and seeing something into a desire for it.
- **He took it** – James 1:14-15 gives the same progression, moving from temptation, enticed by our own desire, desire giving birth to sin, and sin bringing forth death. When Achan took the items and buried them, believing no one saw nor would know, his sin brought forth death. This is the

SAME progression that we face everyday and every time that we sin. The key is stopping the progression before it begins (fixing our eyes on Christ and on things above – Col. 3:1-4), but also by understanding the progression and stopping it before it moves to harmful, sinful, internal desires.

NOTE: Even though God took his life, he still gave praise and glory to God by his open confession of sin. God was glorified, but sin still had to be paid for. Sin always needs payment.

B. Desire to hide the progression

We already talked about why we hide our sin because of improper fear and pride. Achan's sin was stealing, which is very clear from the text and there is a tangible picture of what he stole. But it was not the gold, silver, and coat, per se, that kindled God's anger, but that he stole what belonged to God. The reason that he lied about it (by hiding it) was **that he knew it was wrong** and knew there would be consequences. He also did not want anyone else to know. He kept it hidden from **God and man**. The question we must ALL ask: **"What are those areas that we hide from God and man that truly are to be devoted to God?"** In other words, if Christ truly rules our life as Lord and desires to transform every part of us to His glory and praise, what are areas that we are **"hiding"** or **"stealing"** Him:

- **TIME** – Time is a gift from the Lord that He calls us to make the most of or best use of (Eph. 5:16) since the days are evil. Do we use time that way? Do we view it as a stewardship from the Lord, knowing that we only have a certain amount and do not want to waste it? Do we do things in "private" with our time that would shame us or bring dishonor to the Lord?
- **MONEY** – The coveting of money was at the core of Achan's sin and Ananais and Sapphira. We tend to keep our finances hidden and its one of those questions that we are not supposed to ask (the third rail of the Christian life). But do we spend our money believing that its God's or our? Do we give our money like its God's or ours? If our money is to be devoted to God as the giver of every good thing, and if we know the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10) and though the craving it that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.
- **PURITY** – God wants purity in all areas of our life, and when we believe that going against His plan makes us happier than obedience, we sin. This is particularly true when it comes to sexual sin. Do we believe God wants us to be satisfied in the confines of marriage alone, or do we think there is something better outside of that? Do we think indulging our lusts privately will have no consequence to our joy, passion, or worship? Is it because of personal, private sin going on that causes us to be less than effective in our mission, in our sending, and in our unity?

Do not let hidden sin rule your life. There is hope...

IV. **Hidden sin finds hope in satisfaction (22-26)**

Joshua 7:26 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**.

A. God's anger is satisfied

God's anger was satisfied when the people gathered rocks and stoned Achan and his family. Sin was paid for and justice was done, turning God's wrath and once again allowing God to fight for His people. If this seems brutal, its because it is. It's foreign to our experience only because we live in light of the

finished work of Jesus on the cross. If not for Jesus, we would face the same kind of swift justice. But we have One who became a propitiation for us, meaning He swapped places with us to satisfy God's wrath. This is why John said we have hope and access to the Father because of the finished and ongoing work of Jesus: He is our **Advocate** because He is our **propitiation**!

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

B. Hope is open at the Valley of Achor

But God is not simply the big, bad bully in the OT. He is gracious and merciful, and that is seen dimly in the last verse of Joshua 7. The place where Achan was stoned was named Achor, which means the place of trouble, for obvious reasons. In the centuries to follow, Israel continually rebelled against God which led to their demise and being conquered by outside forces. In their time of sin, God gave this prophecy through the prophet Hosea

Hosea 2:14 "Therefore, behold, **I will allure her**, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵ And there I will give her her vineyards and **make the Valley of Achor a door of hope**. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

God would allow His people to rebel only so long before He brought them back, and He told them that He would bring them back to the place of promise and would make the place of trouble into a door of hope. We believe that will still be fulfilled to His people Israel someday in the land that was promised to Abraham as an everlasting promise.

This is how God works. He is serious about sin, so much so, that He was willing to have Christ die for it. God lavishes grace, prolongs mercy, and is longsuffering in His love. Because of this, we can have confidence to deal with our sin, especially those things that we think are hidden and private. Today is a day to confess your sin, to recover the joy of your salvation, and release the weight and burden of shame that you have been carrying, even if it brings consequences. Will you do it today?

Hidden Does Not Mean Private
Joshua 7

- I. Hidden sin stirs God's anger (1)
 - A. _____ Faith
 - B. Corporate _____

- II. Hidden sin brings dire consequences (2-15; 25)
 - A. _____ Loss
 - A. _____ Cost

- III. Hidden sin grows by a clear progression (16-21)
 - A. _____ of the progression
 - B. Desire to _____ the progression

- IV. Hidden sin finds hope in satisfaction (22-26)
 - A. God's anger is _____
 - B. _____ at the Valley of Achor