

But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

¹⁹Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

²⁰Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: ²¹When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonian, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

²²So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. ²³They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.

²⁴Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵Joshua said, “Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today.”

Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. ²⁶Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since. (NIV84)

Theme: Yes, Sin is a Big Deal!

A husband and a wife go away for a few days on vacation. Before they leave they give their teenage children a list of jobs to do around the house—like take out the trash, clean their rooms, and so on. But when they return none of the jobs are done and the house is a complete disaster—their kids were too busy playing video games and watching movies with their friends to care about what their parents told them to do. The parents are upset and begin yelling at their children. Their

children respond, “What’s the big deal?!? Who cares! Don’t worry about it; we’ll get it all done. Just calm down!”

What was a big deal to the parents wasn’t a big deal at first to the teenagers—but they eventually come to understand that it was a big deal as they had to face the consequences.

Achan probably thought that his sin wasn’t that big of deal. He along with the rest of the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho seven times, they shouted, blew the trumpets and the walls came crashing down. Joshua told the Israelites that all the possessions of Jericho belonged to God and were to be devoted to him. He also warned them about taking anything for themselves, **Keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.**

But what did Achan do? He saw in the rubble a nice imported coat, about five pounds of silver, and about a pound and a quarter of gold. He took them and then hid them beneath his tent. He chose money and possessions over God and his Word. He loved the things of this world more than God—committing the sin of secret idolatry. He probably tried to justify his actions in his own mind: “It’s just a little bit, God’s certainly not going to miss any of it—he’s getting so much anyway. I need to take care of my family. It would be such a shame to burn such a nice robe. I’m sure everyone else is taking something for himself. It’s really, not a big deal.”

After Jericho the Israelites looked to defeat the small town of Ai. It should have been a slaughter for the Israelites, but instead, Ai routed the Israelites and killed 36 men. Why did this happen? Because the Lord was angry with his people for sinning against him. He had not fought with the Israelites against Ai, and so they were routed and killed by an inferior enemy.

So the Lord told Joshua to gather the people in the morning and the Lord would reveal who took the things. And when that person was caught would be killed, **He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done a disgraceful**

thing in Israel! So it may not have seemed like a big deal to Achan, but to God it certainly was.

We often fall into the same sin as Achan, who stole from God because of his love of money and possessions. Our stealing from God may not be so blatant as taking money from the offering plate, but what do we withhold from the Lord for the sake of luxury or convenience? How often do we robe him of praise and glory simply because we don't feel like going to worship or because we have other things to do?

But we commit secret idolatry not just when we make a conscious decision to avoid God or when we chose something else before we chose him. It often happens over time, without our even knowing. Over time the things of this world—maybe its money or our possessions, maybe its family, work, or sports—it could any number of different things—and it is probably different for each and every one of us—over time, those things grab our hearts; they become so important to us that they are all we think about or strive toward. God and his Word get pushed to the back burner, and we might not even know it. We are often completely unaware of the many gods we have in our lives.

And when we do realize it, we might try to rationalize it away: “It's really not that big of a deal, everyone else is doing it. More than half our members don't come to worship on any given Sunday, and very few people actually attend bible study. I can still love God and believe in him without being a ‘Jesus freak.’ God has given me many great things in this life, he certainly can't be angry at me for loving the gifts that he has given me! And besides, I don't love the things of this world too much—just look at me compared to the rest of the world, and you can see that I do put God first in my life quite often.”

We may look at such sins as no big deal, like Achan may have with his. But it is certainly a big deal to God. He had Achan and all that belonged to him stoned and burned. The same thing will happen to those who reject Christ. Those who don't believe in the Lord will die. But they won't just die a physical death, but an eternal death. Those who reject him in favor of something else will be destroyed eternally in the fires of hell. Secret Idolatry may not seem like a big deal to us, but it certainly is to the Lord.

It is such a big deal to God that he sent his only son into the world. God came down from heaven and lived among us as true God and true man. God sent his Son into the world to die for our sins, to become one of us and be numbered with the transgressors. He sent his son in to the world to suffer through the eternal punishment for our sins. Sending his son to suffer through hell and die is the only way that we could be saved from our sins.

So it was something that Christ was willing to do—to give up the glories and riches of heaven, to give up his life, to be forsaken by his heavenly father. In the Garden of Gethsemane we see that Jesus knew exactly what would happen and how painful it would be—not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually, and yet he willingly went through out. So that he could forgive the guilt of all our sins, suffer through our punishment, and thus save us.

After the Israelites did to Achan what God commanded them to do—stoning and burning him, God's fury subsided. He was no longer angry with them because a sinful and wicked person was living among them. He told Joshua to go face Ai again and he would be with him. And the Lord led Israel to a resounding victory over their enemies. It was just the beginning of their campaign in the Promised Land. God had been promising the land of Canaan to his children for over 500 years. It was finally time for them to take possession of the land. So God was with them and led them in battles throughout Canaan. They destroyed and drove out their enemies and settled in the Promised Land of Canaan.

God is a just God who demands that our sins be paid for. When Christ suffered and died on the cross, he paid for our sins. God demands death for sins, so Christ died in our place as our substitute. He satisfied God's demand for justice and God's fury against us subsided. No longer is God angry at us. No longer will our sins be counted against us. He no longer sees us as sinners. No, when he looks at his he sees his Son, and the perfect life that Jesus has given to us. So the wrath of God has been satisfied by the blood of Christ, shed on the cross and given in payment for our sins. God's wrath will not come down on us, for it has already come down on Christ.

Achan had to face the consequences of his sin. And there may be consequence that we face for our sins as well. But don't confuse consequence with punishments. We may face consequences for our

sins to keep us from committing those sins again. But the punishment for our sins is eternal death. That punishment was suffered by Christ already. We will not be punished for our sins because of Christ who removed our sins from us and suffered through their punishment. About 900 years after Joshua, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about Christ's suffering and death and wrote, **Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.**

Since God's wrath has been satisfied, when we die we know where we will be going. Like the Israelites who took over the Promised Land of Canaan, so we will be in our own Promised Land. But this Promised Land is far better—it doesn't require any fighting or killing or driving out of people. It is heaven—a perfect and glorious place where we will live without sin and the effects of sin. It is where we will dwell with God and his all his believers as we share in his glory and sing his praise into eternity!

We are sinners who constantly fail to keep even his first commandment. And yet, God in his grace and mercy sent his son to be our substitute and sacrifice himself in our place. And so, because of Christ we will live in the Promised Land—we will live in heaven, forever with the Lord! That is how gracious, loving, and forgiving our Lord is!

While Achan was put to death for his sin, yet for all we know he is in heaven. Scripture is silent on the matter, and we are never told what was in his heart—did he truly repent and believe in forgiveness or was he simply confessing his actions because he had been caught. It seems, to me, that he did repent, but we won't know for sure this side of heaven.

But what we do know is that Achan's confession is one that all of us can follow. He didn't hide from his sins, he didn't make excuses for them, and he didn't try to justify his actions. He openly confessed all of his sins, even giving specific details. He confessed all his sins. The teenager doesn't think that failing to listen to his parents is that big of a deal. The devil tries to convince us that our sins also aren't that big of a deal. But they are to the Lord. So let us follow the

example of Achan's confession. We don't hold back, for where sin increases God's grace increases all the more. There is no reason to deny your sins, to try to justify your actions, or to hide details. The Lord knows all and he forgives all through Christ. When we confess our sins and trust in the Lord for forgiveness we are giving glory to God and praise to his name. Therefore, let us confess our sins so that they may be wiped out by the Lord!

And let us obey the Lord with our whole heart. Motivated by his love and forgiveness let us strive to put him first in our lives and in our hearts—serving him with our whole heart and knowing that when we fail we are forgiven by our loving and gracious Lord. Amen.