

SMOLDERING DISOBEDIENCE AND THE STORY OF TROUBLE (Joshua 7:1-26)

Do you remember Norman Vincent Peale? He was a pastor, author, and editor. In 1945, at the end of World War II, he his wife Ruth, and a businessman founded *Guidepost* magazine, which is still being published today. His most popular book was *The Power of Positive Thinking* which he wrote in 1952, It stayed on the New York Times' best-seller list for 188 consecutive weeks. He pastored the same church in NYC from 1932 to 1984 when retired. That same year President Reagan awarded Peale with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor a civilian can receive.

Peale once told a story on himself. When he was a boy he found a big, black cigar. He slipped into an alley and lit it up. It didn't taste good, but it made him feel grown up. He saw his father coming, so he hid the cigar behind his back and tried to play it cool. To divert his father's attention, he pointed to a billboard advertising the circus. He pled, "Can I go, Dad? Please, let's go when it comes to town."

His father's reply taught Norman Vincent Peale a lesson he never forgot. His dad answered, "Son, never make a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience."

Have you ever hid a smoldering disobedience while trying to get God to do for you what you want Him to do?

We come today to Joshua 7. There was a smoldering disobedience in the camp of the Hebrew people, but no one saw the smoke except God. The man who hid the disobedience was a man named Achan. The root of his name meant "to trouble." That word is the last word in the last sentence of Joshua 7. The valley in which the people of God camped came to be known as the Valley of Trouble.

Did you ever see someone coming and say, "Here comes trouble"? Achan's name meant trouble, and he most certainly brought trouble. The story before us is the story of trouble. We are going to learn how trouble starts, how trouble spreads, and how trouble is stopped.

I am not going to read all 26 verses of this chapter; so, let me summarize the story. In the previous chapter God gave the children of Israel a great victory over Jericho.

You have heard it said, "To the victor go the spoils." That was standard operating procedure for war in the ancient world. If you won a battle over your enemy, you had the right to take anything of value in the city you just conquered.

We must keep in mind, however, that the Israelites did not win the battle over Jericho. God won the battle, and he told them not to take anything for themselves. In subsequent battles, they would be allowed to do so, but not after this one. Instead, they were to devote everything to destruction except those things made of gold, silver, bronze, or iron (6:18-19). All such items were to go into the Lord's treasury. They were used later in the building and furnishing of His temple.

Unbeknownst to Joshua and the army, there was one soldier who disregarded the orders that were given. He took some of the forbidden items for himself and hid them in his tent. He dug a hole in his tent to hide the silver.

As we consider the story of trouble, note . . .

Trouble Starts Inside Us

Eventually, Achan's smoldering disobedience became known. He was asked to confess, and to his credit, he did. We find his confession in 7:20-21. Achan saw a beautiful, Babylonian robe, 5 pounds of silver, and 20 ounces of gold. I don't know how much value those items held in Joshua's day, but I checked on their value today. A high-end man's suit is \$1,500 and up. Five pounds of silver is valued at over \$1,800. The current price of gold is \$1,970 per ounce; so, the value of 20 ounces would be \$39,400. That was as of Thursday, November 2nd. It changes daily and throughout the day.

The key word in v. 21 is "coveted." Achan saw these items, and he coveted them.

The one commandment of the Ten Commandments that is most often broken, I believe, is the tenth one, which says: "You shall not covet . . ." Then, it lists things your neighbor might have that you might want and ends with the words, "or anything that is your neighbor's."

We are a materialistic people. We want what we do not have. At a young age we learn to substitute the word "need" for the word "want." And to make us feel better, we add the word "really" before the word "want." We tell ourselves, "I really need some new clothes; I really need some new shoes; I really need a new this, and I really need a new that."

The interesting thing is that we don't know we need something until we see it advertised. Advertisers know this, and that is why businesses will spend millions of dollars every year advertising whatever it is that they sell.

I read that the average American sees between 4,000 and 10,000 ads every day. These ads come not only through TV commercials, but on radio, in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, and whenever you go online on your computer, watch out, ads will start popping up.

Most people will do a pretty good job of ignoring those ads, but every now and then, one will capture your attention, and the thing that is being advertised will capture your heart. You will want, you will covet that thing. You will say to yourself, "I want that thing. I need that thing."

It is called Potomac Mills Mall. It is the largest discount shopping mall in Virginia and is said to be one of the top tourist attractions in the state. It boasts 225 stores divided among five neighborhoods with a total of 19 anchor stores including an 18 screen AMC theater complex. It has more than 1.5 million square feet of retail space.

A few years ago, PBS ran a documentary on the mall in which the narrator reported, "Seventy percent of us visit malls each week—more than attend churches or synagogues. On average we shop 6 hours a week and spend only 40 minutes playing with our children." A woman who was shopping was interviewed. She said, "You shop and spend money—what else matters?"

Inside the mall a Potomac Mills TV commercial plays, and an announcer says, "Shopping is therapy. Listen to that little voice in your head. Shop. Shop. Shop. Shop. You can buy happiness. Just don't pay retail for it."

Jesus warned, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," but we don't believe Him. We

think it does. Because we want what we don't have, we are sorely tempted to take what is not ours.

That's what Achan did, and sometimes we do, too. The sin of thievery begins on the inside. It starts with covetousness. Covetousness causes other sin. James wrote, "You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel" (James 4:2).

Murder, fighting, quarreling—that all starts with wanting what we do not have. It gets worse. Paul warned Timothy:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

And piercing to which he refers has nothing to do with earrings or nose rings.

Trouble starts on the inside. How do we combat it? We combat it with being grateful and learning to be content. Paul prefaced his words of warning to Timothy with these words:

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world, and we cannot take anything out of this world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content (1 Tim. 6:7-8).

Focus on what you do have not on what you don't have. I urge you to cultivate contentment by practicing gratitude. Grateful people are happy people while covetous people are frustrated, unhappy people.

While trouble starts inside us . . .

Trouble Spreads Beyond Us

Look at Joshua 7:1. Notice that the verse starts with the word "But." Up until this chapter everything had been wonderful. The people were experiencing victory after victory. Then, came the word "But." Now, everything changes because of one man's sin.

The author claims that the people broke faith, but then he lays the blame at one man's feet—Achan. He is the one who sinned; yet, God's anger did not burn against Achan alone but against "the people." Look also at v. 17.

You may say, "That's not fair!" Your unhappiness with the situation does not change the situation. Be sure about this, your eternal salvation does not hinge on the actions of others, but your temporal situation does.

Not a single county in Oklahoma voted for Biden. All 77 counties in Oklahoma voted for incumbent, but that fact does not exempt us from President Biden's policies or his decisions. We are part of the whole.

One man in the camp of the Hebrews sinned, but his sin affected the whole camp. When the army went out against the little town of Ai, God did not go with them. God did not fight for them, and the children of Israel lost 36 fighting men that sad day. They died

because of one man's sin. I'm sorry, but that's the way it works.

Hamas brutally attacked Israel, killed 1400 people, and injured thousands more. Hamas comprises the leadership of the Palestinian people in Gaza. It was Hamas not the Palestinians that were the perpetrators of those war crimes. Even so, to eradicate Hamas, many Palestinians have died and more will die as the fighting continues. That's not fair, but that's the way it is. Trouble spreads.

You have seen the commercials advertising Las Vegas. The commercials claim, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." That's not true. Both the destructive nature of sin and the destructive consequences of sin travel. Like the coronavirus, the trouble of sin spreads.

- Your addiction hurts those closest to you.
- Your gossiping or critical tongue hurts those who thought you were their friend.
- Your unfaithfulness hurts your spouse, your children, your family.
- Your foolish spending hurts your family, your church, your community.
- Your lack of commitment to Christ hurts His heart and the progress of His kingdom in this world.

Sin is not a private affair. You are part of a community, and sin affects the community of which you are a part.

The Bible teaches that Adam and Eve sinned. We are part of the human race, and because our first parents sinned, we are affected by their sin. From them, we received a sin nature. We are sinners by choice because we are first sinners by nature. Think of it this way: We are not sinners because we sin. No. We sin because we are sinners. We have a sin nature that leads us into sin.

Adam and Eve's sin affected us, and our sin affects others. Trouble starts inside us; then, trouble spreads beyond us.

Trouble Is Stopped by the One Over Us

God has the answer to our sin problem; we do not. We can pass laws. We can hold classes and seminars. You can come hear sermons and read books. But we can't stop sin. God can.

The first thing God does is to allow us to feel the pain of sin. We turn to sin because we believe it is pleasurable, and it is. If sin wasn't pleasurable, we wouldn't chase after it. Sin, however, has consequences, and those consequences are painful. Sin causes pain, regret, torn lives, and torn hearts.

In the story before us, 36 men died; 36 wives became widows; 36 sets of children became fatherless. In addition to that, the people lost their courage. Their leader, Joshua, regretted the mission and feared the future (7:7-9).

It wasn't until v. 9 that Joshua learned why the people failed to take Ai. God promised Joshua that the man who had sinned would be found out, and he would be dealt with.

Eventually, God fingered Achan. Joshua asked Achan to confess, and Achan did. He told the whole story. Achan was harshly judged. Look at vv. 25-26.

I want you to realize that this is an Old Testament story. This took place before Jesus

came, before Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sin.

Today, after we sin, we are to feel the weight of our sin. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sin. If you can sin and not ever feel sorry or ever feel guilt for your sin, something is wrong. Either the Holy Spirit is not doing His job or you don't have the Holy Spirit living inside you. I feel quite certain the Holy Spirit is not shirking His responsibility; so, I would have to conclude that the person who sins and never feels the weight of his sin lacks the Holy Spirit in his or her life. The Bible is clear. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you do not belong to Him. You are not His child.

So, here is the process: We sin. We feel the weight of our sin. Then, we confess our sin. The word *confess* means to "agree with." When we confess our sin, we agree with God. We say, "Yes. That was me. What I did was wrong."

Then, with God's help, we turn from that sin. That is what it means to repent. We go the opposite direction.

Achan was not allowed to just say, "Yeah, my bad. Sorry about that." That sin had to be paid for. He had to bear the penalty of his sin.

You and I live on the other side of the cross and on the other side of the empty tomb. When Jesus died, He took upon Himself the penalty of our sin and the sin of all who would trust Him. He bore our punishment.

The 5th amendment of our constitution gives us protection against what is called *double jeopardy*. That means you cannot be tried, convicted, and sentenced twice for the same crime.

That same protection exists in God's court. Your sin has been dealt with by the Son of God. He bore your punishment with His suffering and death on the cross. All your sin has been paid for—past, present, and future.

Now, when you sin, the Spirit of God causes you to feel the guilt of your sin. You are to confess it and repent of it. The Bible assures us that when we confess our sin, God cleanses and forgives us (1 John 1:9). At that point, we can thank God for what He has done for us.

The Apostle Paul was troubled by his sin. He tells us of this in Romans 7. Basically, he said, "What I want to do, I don't do, and what I don't want to do, I end up doing." Look at what he wrote in Romans 7:21-25. Jesus is the One who gave him victory. Look also at Romans 8:1-4.

Neither you nor I can solve our sin problem. God solved it for us in the person and work of His Son.

This last word of the last sentence of the last verse of chapter 7 is not the last time we find that word used in the Bible. It shows up two more times outside of Joshua. The Israelites did not stay in the Valley of Trouble. They moved out of the valley, and you can, too.

This word is used in Isaiah 65:10 and Hosea 2:15. I want you to see how it is used in Hosea 2. The prophetic book of Hosea is about God's faithfulness to His unfaithful people. The people of Israel are pictured as God's wife, but they were unfaithful to Him. They went after other lovers. You might have expected God to say, "Well, good riddance. I'm better off without them." But, that's not what He said.

God wanted His people back. Let me read to you Hosea 2:14-15. These words come from a broken-hearted, yet loving God who had not given up on His unfaithful Bride:

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 promised to make the Valley of Trouble a door of hope.

That is God’s promise to you. Your failure is not final. God has not given up on you.
He wants you back. I call upon you, “Return to Him. Come back to Him.”

In the NT, Jesus said, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me” (John 14:1).