



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



HG66: Inhabiting The Promised Land (5/6)
Achan: When Things Start To Go Wrong

Joshua 7:1-26

Home Group Study Notes

11th March 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

We are now in the season of Lent, a time when we remember Jesus' Forty Days in the wilderness. What, if anything, might you be giving up for Lent this year? Is this *giving up* a helpful discipline for the Christian or should more emphasis be placed on things we could *do* during the period of Lent?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) Why might have Joshua, and the spies, have become over confident in God? Share with your group your own experiences of being over confident in God (if you feel able to do so) and their consequences

2) Why do you think God made Joshua resolve this situation in front of all the people?

3) Why is sin and disobedience so destructive (see also 1 Samuel 15:20-23)? Why was God's punishment on Achan so severe?

The Wages of Sin is Death, vs 24 - 26

This story ends in quite a shocking way and shows us the severity of God's judgement, that: *the wages of sin is death*, Romans 6:23. Joshua, together with all Israel, vs24, took the Babylonian robe and the gold and silver and Achan and his sons and daughters, and his oxen and asses and sheep, and his tent, and all that he had to the Valley of Achor. Joshua asks Achan, vs25: *Why have you brought this trouble on us?* Followed by that sad, final sentence: *The Lord will bring trouble on you today.* And then all Israel stoned him and his family and his cattle. The people acted decisively toward sin in the same way that God calls us to deal with sin in our lives. After this they burned them (cleansing/ purification of the Holy Spirit) and built a heap of boulders over the execution site. A constant reminder of the danger of sinning against God.

The sad thing for me in this story is that Achan never asked for forgiveness. The only reason he ever admitted his guilt in the first place was that Joshua forced him into the open. But God is a God of justice. The legitimate wrath that God has toward sin cannot allow him to be sentimental. God dealt swiftly with Achan because he couldn't afford to let this greed run rampant through his people during this period of new beginnings in the Promised Land. And, at the heart of the story of Achan is this crucial spiritual issue: Sin will either master us, or we will master sin. Genesis 4:7: *Sin is crouching at your door, it desires to have you, but you must master it.* When Achan sinned the blessing and strength of God came to an end and the nation met with discipline and failure. But once the sin was dealt with, the blessing and strength of God, by His grace, resumed. We can't have a temporary relationship with sin. We can't play with it; we can't go just so far and then cut it off, because it will destroy us. The temptation to sin is an ever-present danger in the life of every Christian.

We can't be neutral in our attitude toward sin. We often think that we can play with sin just a little. You know, those nice, agreeable, pleasurable sins that don't really hurt anybody because they are done in secret – or so we believe! We think that we can keep sin under control, limit its influence or our involvement. Without realising that we soon fall under its control and that, little by little, it eventually masters us.

Conclusion

There's a short step, isn't there, between victory and defeat. One moment we can be riding high on the back of some spiritual success, and the next we are plunged into the valley of some grim spiritual failure. The victory at Jericho had been a wonderful success, carried out in strict obedience to the battle plan of God and accomplished by His power. The defeat at Ai came about because of over confidence. The people had forgotten that it was God who had delivered them - how often we forget that too.

There was also a lack of prayer, particularly on the part of Joshua. He acted on what the spies had said rather than on directions from God. It's so easy to forge ahead with our plans without consulting God, isn't it - particularly if things seem to be going well? But we proceed at our peril when we leave Him out of our plans and decision-making.

But probably the most significant point in this whole story is that Achan robbed God and, in the process, brought defeat and judgement on the whole community. Now the implications of that are immense, because if it was true then, it must be true now. Are you robbing God in some area of your life? What areas in your life are you 'yielding' to? What are the things in your life that ought to be brought into the light? What might you be doing to cause the whole of the church community to miss out on God's victory and blessing for us? Whatever they are, God asks us to deal decisively with them and we must do that honestly and positively. And so we must ask the Holy Spirit to reveal, cleanse, purify and renew our hearts and lives.

God's saying: Just hang on a second Joshua. I don't think you're seeing clearly here. There's a reason for this, but you've got to be willing to look for sin in the camp. Vs13: *I will not be with you any more unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.*

Someone had broken one of the commands God gave in 6:18, before the battle of Jericho, to: *Keep away from the devoted things ... otherwise the whole Israelite camp will be liable to destruction.* Praying means that we are willing to accept God's diagnosis of our problems rather than our own evaluation. We could do well to learn to pray with Joshua's honesty, and intensity and then, having done that, we need to stop talking and start listening, because God sees things very differently than we do - which is clearly the case here. God brings objectivity into Joshua's out-of-control approach. God isn't very therapeutic about what He's saying. His language is blunt, it hurts, it's offensive – as scripture can so often be when it speaks into the very depths of our heart and soul.

The Corrupting Influence of Sin, vs 14 - 18

One individual in the camp had betrayed God's trust, and the verdict wasn't, 'Achan has sinned' but 'Israel has sinned.' One man had failed, and the whole army was defeated. God was dealing with them as a chosen people through whom His purposes for men were to be fulfilled. Someone, being disobedience in secret, had affected the future of the whole nation. God explains to Joshua what to do. He is to have the people present themselves by tribe, clan, family, and individually. So Joshua does what he's told to do and, under God's guidance, separates the tribe of Judah, then the families of Judah, then the family of the Zerahites, then Zabdi. God works through Joshua's spiritual sensitivity and discernment to sift out the offender until Achan is finally exposed.

Yielding to Temptation Leads to Defeat, vs 19 - 23

Vs19: *Then 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 ... and I want to hear everything.* Achan confesses, in front of the people, vs20: *It's true. I have sinned against the Lord.* And he goes on to explain how he was tempted when he saw the beautiful Babylonian robe and the gold and silver and how he'd hidden them underneath his tent. Joshua sent messengers to the tent and, sure enough, vs22-23, it was all there. But let's look again at this 'forced' confession of Achan. I say forced because he didn't come forward, voluntarily, to confess or to throw himself on the mercy of God. Yes, he admits that the beautiful Babylonian robe and the gold and silver tempted him but, in order to justify his actions, he reclassifies what they are. He calls them plunder - or spoils of war - but they weren't. This wasn't something he was entitled to as a soldier; they belonged to God and were part of his treasury, 6:24.

Achan admits that he desired them and that tells us a bit of where he was coming from. We don't know why – God was providing everything he needed. But, for whatever reason, he was preoccupied with his own desires and failed to rest in God's providence and goodness. He was dissatisfied. Temptation is something that all of us face every day but it's not the temptation that is wrong, it is the yielding, the 'giving in.' It's that old picture of the devil on one shoulder telling us that we'll enjoy sinning and how it won't do us any harm and God telling us that it will be harmful and will spoil our fellowship with Him and that we shouldn't do it.

Achan's 'giving in' caused him to seek satisfaction in the material instead of the spiritual. His sin could be classified in many ways. However, one thing that we dare not miss in all of this, is that Achan robbed God. How often have we, I wonder, robbed God in our lives? You may say, me? No! Nay! Never! In Malachi 3:8 we read: *Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, how do we rob you? In tithes and offerings.* How many times have we robbed God by withholding our time? Our gifts and abilities? Our God given resources? And the bottom line, from this story in Joshua 7, is that robbing God brings defeat - both as individuals and as a church.

4) How can we receive the mercy of God when we sin (see also 1 John 1:5-10; 1 John 2:1-2)?

5) Paul suggested that at the heart of the story of Achan is this crucial spiritual issue: Sin will either master us, or we will master sin. Genesis 4:7 we read: *Sin is crouching at your door, it desires to have you, but you must master it.* How might each one of us 'master' sin in our lives?

6) Read Hebrews 4:13-16, together and spend some time praying through some of the issues and concerns that this study has highlighted.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG66: Inhabiting The Promised Land (5/6) *Achan: When Things Start To Go Wrong*

Joshua 7:1-26

Home Group Sermon Notes

11th March 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

Let's recap the story so far. Moses had died and God appointed Joshua as the new leader, who moved the children of Israel out of the wilderness right up to the banks of the River Jordan eventually crossing over. And, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, they besieged the city of Jericho. At the great climax of the battle 6:20: *When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.* God gave Joshua and the Israelites a great victory because they'd obeyed his specific instructions - it was a miracle. Joshua understood, very clearly, that the battle was the Lord's and that was where the power lay. To use one of the rounds in a *Question of Sport*: What happened next? Not what we might expect. Ch7 begins with the ominous word: *but*. It's one of those words that tell us that things are going to change, that there's a hiccup - something is not right. 6:27: *The Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land.* 7:1: *But!*

The Danger of Over Confidence vs 1 - 5

We know immediately that something is wrong vs1: *the Israelites acted unfaithfully.* And Achan was the culprit. Joshua had sent spies to spy out the opposition. It had been done before, ch2, and worked very successfully - there was no reason to think that it wouldn't work again. On their return they suggested that they could easily manage to defeat them with just a few men, vs3: *oh ... two or three thousand ... should be enough.* Rather than receiving their reports of what they saw Joshua treats the spies like military advisers and instantly takes their advice. After the tremendous victory at Jericho those spies made the mistake of being over confident in thinking that the victory was theirs and not God's.

They decided that the city of Ai was an easy target - only it wasn't and the men in Ai chased them off, killing thirty six of them in the process. Which is a bit ironic because, during the seven days they spent marching thirteen times around the walls of Jericho, there wasn't one casualty. However, Joshua forgot to do the single most important thing in this situation and that was to pray. There's no mention of him seeking God's will before this battle in contrast to all that had taken place before. There's no gathering together to say: *Lord, what is it you would have us do?*

As I've prepared this sermon I've had to address something of my own vulnerability. I tend to trust my own judgement and, on occasions, can be too quick to trust my instincts and abilities rather than to consciously turn to God and ask for his direction in a given situation. Joshua, and the people, acted without God's guidance and, surprise surprise, and shockingly for them, they are defeated - simply because they left God out of the equation. And so, vs5: *the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.* This defeat destroyed their morale and confidence. Their strength was drained and was melting away - what a contrast to their conquest of Jericho.

His Strength in our Weakness, vs 6 - 13

In vs6-13 Joshua turned to God and shows us how defeat can be overturned if we confess our failures and surrender to His direction to receive His strength in our weakness. The successful leader is not someone who doesn't make mistakes or experiences failure, but rather someone who learns that failure need not be the end and responds by doing something - whether the failure was his own or someone else's.

Charles Colson was one of the most high profile men in America with unlimited influence and power, yet he ended up in prison. He was the man who took the rap for President Nixon for the infamous Watergate tapes scandal. He thought his career was over - and in a way he was right - but God had other plans and he would be called to minister to men in prison, just like him, and he started Prison Christian Fellowship - which is now an international outreach. He reflects: *The real legacy of my life was my biggest failure - that I was an ex-convict. My great humiliation - being sent to prison - was the beginning of God's greatest use of my life; He chose the one experience in which I could not glory for His glory.*

A successful leader learns to be realistic and is prepared to recognise that they can't be right all the time - there's no such thing as a perfect/infallible leader. Joshua, of course, was stunned by the defeat at Ai, but he refuses to stand back. He understands that the power of God that was so wonderfully at work in the battle of Jericho is gone. Joshua recognises that, despite all God had done through him, his past leadership has, almost, no significance in this situation and he's determined to find out the cause. A reminder, as I've often said in the past, that we can't rest on our history, our inheritance and our past experiences for the spirituality we have today.

Joshua didn't accept defeat as the norm - as we so often do. And so both he, and the elders, got down in prayer to seek God's face and the fact that they end up prostrate before the Ark certainly suggests that they were humbling themselves and showing their desperate need of His intervention and wisdom. The tearing of their clothing and the covering themselves with dust was the Hebrew tradition of humiliation and grief as well as mourning and despair.

However, if we examine the prayer carefully we see that Joshua is driven by self-pity and doubt - he's self-serving. He's emotional and subjective, and God, in his grace, gives him a bit of leeway. Joshua cries out challenging and arguing with God, blaming Him for setting them up for defeat, vs7: *... why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan?* Joshua has got a short memory hasn't he? But before we come down too hard on Joshua, let's just remember that, at least, he has this conversation with God rather than with someone else. At least he's praying about it.

Most of us, I'm sure, have the same kind of mixed emotions when we come before God in times of confusion, anxiety, anger or frustration and, just because we feel that way, doesn't mean that we shouldn't come to God to pray. God doesn't expect us to be indifferent or to be coldly theological, pretending our problems don't exist - reading through the psalms shows us this - he loves to hear the anxieties of our hearts. Joshua is basically saying, vs9, in the words of Private Fraser: *We're all doomed.* It's the beginning of the end. Joshua is saying that every Canaanite king is going to hear about this humiliation and send all their troops, overrun the plains of Jericho; and slaughter every Israelite.

Oh, and by the way, Lord, your reputation as the God of Israel won't mean much either. Prayer, however, isn't one-way traffic. Prayer also involves listening for God's voice. God interrupts Joshua, vs10, and responds, as Corporal Jones does: *Don't panic.* God orders Joshua to stand and tells him exactly what the problem is. Vs11-12: *Israel has sinned, they have violated my covenant ... they have stolen ... lied ... that is why they can't stand against their enemies.*