

The Sin of Achan: Mandate for Retribution

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Edited transcript of message

We come today to the seventh exposition in this portion of the word of God, dealing primarily with the narrative concerning a man whose only claim to fame was his sin. Had Achan not sinned, we have no reason to believe that his name would ever have occurred in the pages of holy Scripture. But his claim to fame lies in the gruesome reality of his sin and the tragedy which that sin brought to a whole nation and ultimately of course in a more intensified way to himself and to his family.

Let me remind you briefly of the overall thrust of our study. Having considered the setting of the sin, God bringing His people into the land of Canaan, concerned to teach them those two great principles, that all of their conquest would be by the putting forth of power on His part, and by the putting forth of an obedient faith on their part, the substance of chapter 7 shows us the sin of Achan, its commission, the sin of Achan its fruition (verses 2-5), the crippling of the whole nation, the rendering of the whole nation impotent to accomplish God's present purpose. And then for several weeks, we have been studying the content of verses 6 through the end of the chapter, the sin of Achan and its purgation.

The first part of the work of purging occurs in verses 6-9. The prayer of Joshua and the elders, preparation for purging, the prayer of the leaders of God's people. Then in verses 10-15, we have the directions for purging: the pronouncement of God to Joshua and the people. The preparation in prayer leads to the pronouncement of God giving directions for the purging of sin. And this morning we are going to study the last verse in that directive of God.

We've looked at the command of God in verse 10: "Get thee up." We've seen the rebuke of God: "Wherefore art thou thus fallen upon thy face?" The indictment of God. "Israel hath sinned." And then the five ways in which that sin has expressed itself. Then the frightening ultimatum of God. "Israel cannot stand before her enemies. I will no longer be amongst my people."

And then we began two Lord's days ago to study the summons to action that comes to the people of God in verses 14 and 15. Will you follow then as I read that summons to action, take two minutes to review the two points we covered last time we studied, and then move to the heart of our study this morning. The summons to action begins with these words:

"In the morning therefore ye shall be brought near by your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come near by families, and the family which the

Lord shall take shall come near by households, and the household which the Lord shall take shall come near man by man. And it shall be that he that is taken with the devoted thing shall be burnt with fire. he and all that he hath because he hath transgressed the covenant of Jehovah and because he hath wrought folly in Israel."

This summons to action that comes to Joshua and to the people contains a call to sanctification. Verse 13: "Up, sanctify the people, and say sanctify yourselves against tomorrow." God is saying in essence, "I am about to have special dealings with you. Therefore, you are to prepare yourself in a special manner."

And then God gives them in the second place the pattern for 4:16 inquisition. He tells them they're to be brought tribe by tribe, family by family, and man by man in order to show them that they are not dealing with Joshua, but with Joshua's God; to show them that they are dealing with a God before whom all things are naked and opened, and to show them that they're dealing with a God who is gracious and gives space for repentance. God gave at least a night for the guilty one to have his conscience active and to face the terrible reality of his sin because he's a God who delights in mercy to whom judgment is a strange word.

But this section, this summons to action contains not only a call to sanctification, a pattern for inquisition, but the focus of our study this morning, it contains a mandate for retribution. And I've chosen the words carefully. A mandate is an authoritative order or command. Retribution is deserved punishment for evil done. And verse 15 then is nothing more or less than a mandate for retribution. It is an authoritative declaration or order concerning deserved punishment for an evil done: "And it shall be." There is no uncertainty, that he that is taken shall be burnt with fire because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord.

Now there are four things in this mandate for retribution. I want to open them up briefly without any word of application, and then I want us to focus in upon one great and burning question that arises out of the teaching of this mandate and attempt to answer it in a most practical and experimental manner.

The mandate for retribution. The first line of thought is this: the certainty of retribution. Look at the language of the text. "And it shall be that he that is taken with the devoted thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath." When Joshua gathered the people together and said,

"The Lord has spoken to me and to the elders, and we are commanding you in the name of Jehovah, God of the covenant, to sanctify yourselves in the light of God's special dealings with you tomorrow. And you are to come by tribes and by families and by households and man by man."

He was serving them notice of the absolute certainty of God's retributive action upon the guilty party. He did not say, "And if the man is discovered and should he perhaps be uncovered." He said, "And it shall be that he that is taken shall be destroyed." And here God was underscoring this note of certainty. As these words were spoken,

Jehovah was letting them know that there was certain discovery and certain punishment of sin.

In the second place, this mandate for retribution tells us something about the objects of that retribution. Not only the certainty of the retribution, but the objects. Who are they? There are two: "And it shall be that he that is taken with the devoted thing shall be burnt with fire." The guilty party as an individual, that individual who has taken of the occurred thing must bear the penalty in his own person. There is to be no abstract dealing with his sin while exempting the person who has committed the sin. Not the fruit of his sin shall be taken alone. That would be the shekels of silver and the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment. But he that has taken, he shall be stoned, he shall bear the judgment.

And then secondly, the second object of this retribution will be the family and the possessions of the guilty party. Notice the phrase in verse 15: He and all that he hath." We trust to deal at greater length when we come to the actual carrying out of this retribution in verses 22-26. Why did God include Achan's family, his cattle, and all of his possessions? Well, I'm not going to answer that question in any detail now, but suffice it to say that God directed that they should all be included in the retribution. And on the surface of things, it should be evident to us that part of the answer lies in the principle that no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself.

You don't live in a sea of isolation. You don't live in a cocoon in which your moral actions have no vibes that touch other people. You and I live in a relationship to others that they stand to be blessed or cursed because of how we conduct ourselves. And though every individual shall bear the full weightage of his own personal sins, there is a frightening doctrine in holy Scripture confirmed in human experience that no man sins to himself. And here we find the retribution is to come not only upon the guilty man but upon all of his household and all of his possessions. And so we have then this object of retribution.

Achan heard them. He stands there listening to Joshua and he hears the certainty of retribution. He hears that the objects of retribution will be not only himself but also his wife, his children, the ones that have sat upon his knee, the one he has hugged to his bosom, the ones to whom he has these deep intimate ties of filial affection, all of his possessions. Achan hears all of this as this ultimatum is issued and the mandate for retribution is given.

Then in the third place we have not only the certainty of the retribution. the objects. but the manner of retribution. Look at it. "And it shall be that he that is taken with the devoted thing shall be burnt with fire." The Israelites understood this in the way the narrative unfolds it further on in the chapter. They were not to be burnt alive. They were first of all to be stoned as we see in verse 25: "And all Israel stoned him with stones, and they burned them with fire, and then covered them with a heap of stones". They were first of all to be executed by corporate stoning.

God had required that whenever a sin worthy of capital punishment was committed, that all Israel should be acted in the stoning of the guilty party. Not just the leader Joshua or Moses or whoever there might be appointed as leader, but all Israel probably representatively, at least in the heads of the tribes or maybe the heads of households. All Israel was to be involved so that there might be this two-fold acknowledgment that we as a body of covenant people are responsible for our inherent purity. We as a body of people should fear, lest this terrible end come upon us also.

But now, why does God add to the general direction to stone to death this directive to meet out retribution with fire? Well, according to such passages as Leviticus 20 and verse 14 and Deuteronomy 13:12 and following--we'll look at just the former--the burning with fire was a way in which God showed His intensified hatred against peculiarly aggravated cases of sin and wickedness.

Leviticus 20 and verse 14 is an example of this very principle: "And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness." And you'll see the marginal reading says it is enormity. It is a peculiar form of wickedness when a man will be living not only with his legitimate wife but in an incestuous relationship with that woman's mother. And to show God's intensified hatred against this peculiarly unnatural, aggravated form of sin, he says, "They shall be burnt with fire, both he and they, that there be no wickedness among you."

And in the Deuteronomy passage which I mentioned, Deuteronomy chapter 13, it's the case of a city in Israel that goes a whoring after other gods. And God says that city shall not only be destroyed with death, but it shall be consumed with fire. And certainly God has shown in the Old Testament His peculiar anger against peculiar forms of devious sin by the pouring out of fire and brimstone upon a whole set of cities and all of the inhabitants. And so God is showing the intensity of His hatred to the sin of Achan by the manner of retribution that He prescribes.

And then the fourth thing that's in our text is the reason for retribution. Why is this retribution to come? Because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord and because he hath wrought folly in Israel. Two reasons for this retribution: because of the nature of the sin against God--it was covenantbreaking, and because of the nature of the sin against the people of God--it was defiling the whole assembly of God's people. And this word "wrought folly [the performance or the enactment of folly]" is a phrase used to describe a crime that is irreconcilable with the honor of Israel as the people of God. Genesis 34:7 speaks of the act of rape committed by a man upon one of the daughters of Israel, and it was called that which was the performance of folly in Israel.

So then the two reasons are very clear. The covenant arrangement between God and His people has been violated and all the way through the Old Testament covenant breaking is the form of spiritual adultery. Always God likens it to spiritual adultery: the

heart going a-horning after other gods, and also the defilement that has reached out in its fruits to the entire nation.

Now bring these four things together. This mandate for retribution, the certainty of it, the objects of it, the manner of it, and the reason of it. And Achan heard every single word of it. Achan heard Joshua say, "This is the mandate of Jehovah. Not only will the sin certainly be discovered, but the man in all that he hath who has committed it shall be stoned and then burnt with fire." And the reason is, "He hath wrought folly in the nation. He hath transgressed covenant."

Now the question that emerges out of this is the one that I want to press before you this morning. How could Achan hear all of this? How could he listen to such words knowing that his sin was going to implicate his wife, his children, his family, all that he possesses; hearing these words about the enormity of his sin, transgressing the covenant of God, folly attributed to the whole nation? How could Achan hear all of this, have at least an entire evening and a few hours in the early morning and still not own up to his sin until he's forced to? Why did not this twin thrust of the overtures of mercy and of judgment elicit from Achan a spontaneous confession of his sin?

But when we read later in the chapter, on the surface of things, it looks like Achan's giving a pretty good confession. But remember, it was forced out of him. It didn't flow from him. It was forced out of him. If it was to be the confession of a man who was truly broken for his sin, here was the place for that confession to flow out. Why didn't it? What processes went on in Achan's mind and heart that would cause him to go through a whole night with these words ringing in his ears? "It shall be that he that is taken shall be burnt. He and all that he hath because he hath wrought folly in Israel." How could he spend the night with the words of that mandate for retribution burning in his ears, knowing that he had a whole night in which to face the sin and come clean before God in man? Why, I say, does he let the light of that day dawn and the whole process of discovery follow through according to God's direction and never own up to his sin? Well, let me suggest there are at least three things that led to this circumstance.

First of all, because of the hardening power of sin in general. There's a text that literally made my heart to tremble several weeks ago in my own devotional exercises. It's that text in Hebrews 3 and verse 12. "Exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened." And here's the phrase: "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

If sin came to us in an ugly form and said, "Look, entertain me and I'll turn a sensitive, pliable, warm, tender heart into something that is so hard and callous that it will face the honor of God in the midst of His people, the life and well-being of your own wife and children, and rather cling to sin than deal with those issues", we'd run from any such appearance of sin. But sin hardens by its powerful force of deception: "lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." "What a foul and viciously evil thing is

sin that will bring a man to the place where neither the sweet overtures of mercy nor the sober threats of judgment will budge him an inch.

What is it that takes the young man who once was shocked to see a bloody nose in a street fight turn around and become a callous professional murderer who can kill people for money and never lose one moment's sleep after he's done his dastardly work. I'll tell you what brings him to that. It's the hardening power of sin. It takes a young woman that used to blush at just the speaking of a risque word or story to where she can be a brazen forehead of a harlot and walk the streets to make a living. I'll tell you what brings her from one state to another. The hardening power of sin.

And you know the same thing is operative in the hearts of God's people. What has brought some of you from the place where in time past if you heard a series such as you've heard the past few weeks on the sin of Achan, you would have been driven to your knees after every Lord's Day with holy trembling crying out, "Lord is it I? Do I have the Babylonish garments? "Do I have the wedge of gold? Do I have the shekels of silver? But there's some of you who have gone clean through the first six of these messages and you haven't been broken before God for 5 minutes. What's happened? The hardening power of sin.

The concept that your sin may be affecting this entire congregation has caused no twinge of pain, no breathless anticipation, no earnest self inquiry. Your conscience has been smitten when I described the significance of the gold and silver, that which was to be dedicated unto God. And when I dealt with such specific things as giving to God His rightful tithe, giving to God His rightful investment of time, and spoke of the squandering of the gold and silver of time before the television and before other pursuits. Your conscience smote you, but like Achan, all the overtures of mercy and of judgment have not budged you from your sin.

You're still spending evening after evening in front of your television. You're still putting paycheck after paycheck into the bank and not giving God His purpose and drawing it out for bills and food and vacation and everything else. What's happened to you? Some of you whose hearts would flutter at the slightest whisper of God in bygone days. You've sat through this whole series unmoved. Unmoved. The hardening power of sin.

Am I speaking to some unconverted person, some young person, some adult? You've heard the warnings as we've based them upon the sin of Achan, that judgment will come no matter how long it slumbers. We may think that our sin is out of sight and out of mind with God, but He will discover it. And then as I turned to the overtures of mercy and set forth the Lord Jesus as the One who was stoned and consumed in the room instead of sinners who bore the anger of God, the overtures of judgment and of mercy have left you utterly unmoved. What's happened to you? Oh my dear friend, what has happened to you is what happened to Achan. You've become a victim of the hardening power of sin. The quickest route to hell is the one packed hard and made smooth by the hardening power of sin.

I shall never forget sitting in a chapel service one time many, many years ago. And yet the thing is as vivid in my mind today as though it were yesterday. It was another time of international and world crisis. And evangelicals were talking about fearing Russia and its intentions, and fearing Rome and its intentions. And I shall never forget a dear man of God who stood and spoke to a group of us students and said these words: "I do not fear Russia. I do not fear communist China. I do not fear Rome. I do not fear liberalism, but the thing I fear more than anything else under heaven is a cold, insensitive heart." And I tell you, that thing went like an arrow to my heart, and I've never forgotten it.

Do you fear a cold, insensitive heart, a heart that becomes hardened through the deceitfulness of sin when you first began to lay your hands upon that Babylonish garment? That thing that is strictly forbidden in the Word of God may be innocent in itself, but forbidden in its excess, so that to you it is a Babylonish garment. You never thought then that the fruit of laying hold of that Babylonian garment and tucking it under the surface of the tent of your own heart would be that you can sit in a place like this through a series like this and come clean through absolutely unscathed. You can sit through a place where there's probably more searching, applicatory pointed preaching than any other place around. Unmoved. Unmoved! Untouched! Oh, my dear friend, you're heading to hell at breakneck speed if you're out of Christ. And dear child of God, you're heading to temporal judgments at breakneck speed. Achan could hear that mandate for retribution and be unmoved because of the hardening power of sin in general.

May I leave you with a text as we move to the second point? The text is Romans chapter 2 that speaks explicitly to this very issue. What that night was to Achan, God's patience day after day is to you. It is the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God (verse four of Romans 2) leading thee to repentance. God has said in this passage, as we've sought to expound it, that sin in the midst of the covenant people brings crippling and blight to the entire assembly. Sin will certainly be tracked down by God. And yet His goodness has withheld temporal judgments, and God continues to shower upon you the manifestations of His kindness and His forbearance to lead you to repentance. But if it doesn't have that issue--look at verse 5: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

My friend, don't feel proud of a hard heart. If I'm talking to an unconverted person this morning who prides himself that he can sit through these sermons and the pleadings and intreaties of your teaching elders and they no longer even scratch the surface, Oh my friend, if you value your soul, you better cry to God, "Oh God, plow up, dynamite this hard heart so that once again it can feel and move under the pressure of the preached Word. "

But then in the second place, Achan came through that mandate of retribution unmoved because of the self-protective power of pride. Not only because of the hardening power of sin in general, but because of the self-protective power of pride in

particular. Pride, that wicked disposition that would cause us to ruin our churches, our families, ourselves rather than be exposed as an Achan.

Can you follow something of the process that may have gone through Achan's mind as he stands there amidst all of his fellow Israelites? And Joshua says, "The Lord has spoken and these are His orders. Up, sanctify yourselves against tomorrow." And he delivers the ultimatum: "You cannot stand until the wicked thing is dealt with." And then he gives the mandate: "And it shall be that the one that the Lord takes shall be burnt with fire. He and all that he hath." And Achan begins to turn over in his mind the implications of his sin. "It means that my wife will be consumed, my children, [however many he had], and all my possessions, and I'll be exposed before all Israel, as the guilty one, and I'll include my family in my shame." But he says,

"If I acknowledge my sin now, if I come to Joshua, how can I ever save face? I stood with the other soldiers when we came back from Jericho. And when Joshua asked us, 'Have you destroyed these things?' I threw my salute and clicked my heels and said, 'Yes, sir, General Joshua, my torch has touched every cursed thing.' When General Joshua asked us, 'Have we brought back all the gold and silver and precious metals to the treasury of God?' I threw my salute and clicked my heels and said, 'Yes, General Joshua. All has been brought back.' How can I dare go before those same people and say I lied? How can I dare face my fellow Israelites? How can I dare face my relatives? How can I dare face the people that know. I can't do that? The price tag is too high. I'll have to lose face."

Ah, but Achan, what about losing your wife? What about losing your children? What about losing any dignity to the family name? History will go down with the consciousness or your name will go down in history conveying the consciousness that the very word "Achan" will be synonymous with shameful sin. And Achan says in essence, "I'd far rather bring my whole family for generations into a state of shame than be exposed and have my pride crucified." Oh, but Achan, the day is coming when you will stand before the whole conglomerate of the mortal universe, men and angels and here the sentence, "Come ye blessed; depart cursed." And Achan says, in essence, "I'll run my chances on bearing shame then, but I will protect myself now."

My friends, if anything should make you want to hate pride, so if it was visibly present, you take it and ring the last ounce of strength out of it. It's to face this kind of power that will cause a man to do such vile and wicked things.

Does this say anything to some of you present this morning? The word has come to you not only in this series in which we've been focusing particularly upon the matters of declension and personal willful sin and transgression in the lives of God's people. But in other sermons, other applications, just the voice of your own conscience. And you have your Babylonian garments, and you know precisely what they are. And you have your wedges of gold and your shekels of silver, and you know precisely what they are.

But along the line you've declared your innocence. You've declared your innocence like Achan did. And under the pressure of this ministry in these past days, you've begun to weigh,

"What will it mean for me to be exposed? I've been coming on holy day with the rest of the saints to the place where they gather. I have declared by my singing of hymns of praise and adoration that I am a child of God, that I glory in the living God, that I'm pressing on to be more like God."

And down underneath you know that you've been carrying on subtle warfares with God and His revealed will. And you've put up a good front before your pastors and your elders and your deacons and your fellow Christians.

And Almighty God has been putting the screws on you in these days. You know what's kept you from coming clean? The self-protective power of pride: "I will not lose faith. I will not. I'll whimper in my closet before the Lord." But your whimpering doesn't help much, does it? Because your sins are of such a nature that you've got to make some restitution at the human level. He's got some things you've got to make right with some other people.

Maybe you've got some things you got to tell your wife, some things you got to tell your husband; some evil speaking you've been doing about some brothers or sisters, maybe about your elders, maybe about your pastors. You've got to humble yourself. You've got to eat crows, feathers, and all. You're to have a conscience void of offense to God and man. What's kept you from coming clean? This self-protective power of pride, the honor of God, the good of your family, the good of the church, everything must be sacrificed upon the altar of your own stinking reputation.

Hello my friend, will you listen to the words of Jesus? Words that come home to me at times when I need them most. In the 12th chapter of Luke, Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." They were masters of the cover up. And Jesus said,

"The best thing to keep you from becoming masters of the cover up through pride of reputation and name and station and standing is to recognize this simple fact: there is nothing covered up, but that that shall not be revealed, and nothing hid that shall not be known. Whatsoever you've said in the darkness shall be heard in the light. And what you've spoken in the ear and in the inner chambers shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."

And I say unto you, my friends, here's the connection. Even if exposure should mean death, far better, he said, to die the death of the body than to die the death of the soul.

What will it take for some of you to be flushed out and to face your sin honestly? Jesus said, "Nothing covered, it shall not be made known." I would far rather, as I have had to do on more than one occasion, be humbled and shamed before my wife and my children, before a congregation of people, and to know the cleansing of the

blood of Christ and the approbation of the consciences of the people of God than come to that day and await everyone while their mouth dropped open and say, "Not him. Not him. Well, I thought...." Ah yes, what you thought doesn't matter. It's what He knows that will be the basis of His dealings with me. And it's not what I think of you and what Pastor Blaze and your elders think, and the fellow people of God. Your reputation is what people think you are. Your condition is what God knows you to be. And in that day, He'll deal with you not in terms of your reputation, but your true condition.

Could anything be more self-destructive than this self-protective power of pride? You see, the very thing that we do in a sense of self-protection is vicious self-destruction because the blood and the merit of Jesus Christ are there to cleanse and pardon and to restore the ruptured relationship between the sinner and His God. Be he the sinner who's never entered into fellowship. Be he the saint whose fellowship is broken because of the Babylonian garments and the wedges of gold and the shekels of silver. Jesus Christ is borne all the shame. He hung naked between earth and heaven for rude eyes to stare at him. He bore the shame, public shame as a common criminal, that finding refuge in His precious blood, that in the merits of His shame, I might be covered. But we are so like Adam, running from God's provision to make our own fig leafed provision. And in so doing, we run from communion with God. Until Adam was found out and discovered and clothed, there was no communion.

As I said two weeks ago, I probed the conscience again. It's been a long time since some of you've known any conscious communion with God. Since the word has really opened up to you, since prayer has been a delight, yet you sweat through that sermon and there you sit this morning. What's the problem? The self-protective power of your pride.

Would God that this week there'd be some telephone calls:

"Pastor, I'm so fouled up, I don't know which end is up, but I'm ready to get straightened out at any cost." That's the kind of pastoral counseling that's a delight. "I'm so fouled up. I don't know which end is up. You were talking to me Sunday morning. Pastor, God described me when he spoke through you. I'm the one who's a monument of the hardening power of sin. I'm the one who's a grotesque monument of the self-protective power of pride."

And then in the third place, Achan heard that mandate for retribution and was unmoved because of the self flattery and vain conceit of his own heart. Perhaps Akin reasoned, "Well, there may be some others just as guilty as I." You see, the man who commits a certain sin usually projects that sin upon others.

"I saw a Babylonian garment; I took it. Maybe some other guy took a whole armful of garments, and maybe some other guy took a whole fistful of wedges of gold. Though I may be guilty to some degree, there must certainly be someone guilty to a greater degree. I couldn't be the cause of the crippling at AI. I mean, it's unreasonable that

God should withhold blessing from a whole nation in so drastic a way, resulting in the death of over 30 of my fellow Israelites just because of my little Babylonish garment.

And he flatters himself that his sin is not so bad. Therefore, there is no need for immediate repentance. Or maybe he reasoned in that vain conceit of Psalm 50 16 to 21 where God says, "You consented with a thief and I was silent, and you've been partaker with adulterers and I said nothing until you thought that I was altogether such and one as thyself." You have lapses of memory and God says you convinced yourself that He was just like you:

"I mean that was a pretty busy time. You know God was blowing the walls down. He was pretty busy. He had his hands full. I mean, God really couldn't see me over in one little part of the city of Jericho taking one little garment in just one little handful of gold and silver. Oh, no. God's not in...."

Vain deceit. Fashioning God after my own likeness to drive from my mind the realization that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, beholding the evil and the good.

It's like the man. Every time I see a man in his 50s smoking, I want to crawl into his mind and read out, have a print out, as a computer will give of his vain deceit. You know, the way the average man reasons. I've talked with younger men along this line. I don't make talking about smoking part of my witnessing. I just make that part of my general concern. And if I saw a guy out the street going to cut his finger off with a knife just out of genuine humanitarian concern, I'd say, "Hey buddy, cut it out. That's not good for you." And when I see people smoking, if it's right, if I have a good opportunity, it's not a matter of my witnessing. It's just humanitarian concern. And you know what I found? I'd say, "Are you aware of the...."

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, but you know, not me. Somebody else, but not me." Oh, yes. If you suck that stuff into your lungs, the chance of cancer is much more advanced. I may be cutting off by the law statistics 10 years off that but not me."

You see vain deceit that the general rules will not apply to me. Why? Not because there's scientific data to prove it but simply because I would like it that way. You see, oh yes, Akin sins and he gets found out. But that was Akin. That's not me. Why? What makes you think it's not you? Only because you'd like it to be that way. Just your vain deceit and wishful thinking, my friend. That's all. You have no biblical grounds to believe that because God says, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

"Oh, but", you say, "mine hasn't." What makes you think it hasn't? The sin of some of you has found you out. Nobody ever feels drawn to you for spiritual counsel and support and encouragement. Why? because they don't sense any reality in your walk with God. You say the right words, you're there at the right place at the right time, but nobody ever says, "Thank you, God, for bringing Mr. So and so into my life."

Or as one dear brother said here, one of our officers back a few months ago, beholding a man, just walked by him in this congregation. The man is very quiet,

doesn't say an awful lot. And he said, "I thank God for that brother. Every time I look at him, I see a pillar of strength and it encourages me to go on with God."

See, I'm not talking about running off at the mouth. There's some of you run off the mouth real well, and you're convinced you're God's blessing to everybody you meet. You've got a very loquacious tongue. But if it weren't for you making yourself a blessing by your talk, nobody'd be drawn to you. And I put blessing in parenthesis in quotes.

How long has it been since somebody has really felt at ease to come and bear the heart and say, "I believe you know God better than I do. Can you help me?" I'm not talking about you going to them and say, "Now, I know God a little better. Would you like to listen to me?" Self-appointed prophets. No. No.

You see, your sin has already found you out. Your kids can't come and sit next to you and say to you, "Daddy, mommy, a lot of things I don't understand in life. But one thing I know, your religion is real." My friend, if you can't have your kids say that, as far as I am concerned, I'd want the earth to open up and swallow me. If I can't have the approbation of the conscience of my own wife and children that in spite of all my sin and failure, there's something real that they want true religion; they want what their daddy's got.

Some of you don't have that. Your sins have already found you out, those Babylonish garments, those wedges of gold and shekels of silver, eating like termites of the vitals of genuine biblical piety and godliness. You flatter yourself that, "Well, my sin's not as great as anothers." And you fill yourself with vain conceit that perhaps your sin will not find you out.

Am I speaking to Achan this morning? Achan, your God comes to you in mercy with a frightening mandate, a frightening mandate:

"He shall be taken. He shall be burned. He and all that he hath because he hath transgressed covenant and wrought folly. But Achan, you have a night in which to ponder the sobering words of my impending judgment. And Achan, you have a night in which to seek Me as the merciful God who's entered into covenant with Israel. Achan, there is space for repentance. Achan, there is opportunity for turning."

And how I thank God that I can close on this positive note this morning. As a minister of the gospel, I have no such mandate as Joshua had to find the Achans and to stone them and to burn them and to heap stones upon them as a monument. Thank God I have another mandate. I have a mandate to hold out to sinners the gracious provision of God who sent His beloved Son and consumed Him by the stones and the fire of His own wrath, that every guilty sinner who has willfully deliberately run after and indulged in and come to his sin, upon the moment of repentance and faith may find full and complete acceptance based upon that frightening baptism of the Son of God who was consumed by the fire of God's anger who said at the conclusion of that consumption from heaven, "It is finished."

And dear child of God, I'm so glad I have a mandate to say to you, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But part of true confession is willingness to be exposed as much as my sin demands. Not more. We're not starting some new kind of Buckminism, moral rearmament, saying, "Let's have a confession meeting." No, no. I'm saying true confession involves the willingness to be exposed as much as is absolutely necessary. True confession for Zacchaeus meant going back through his ledgers and paying back every bit of money he had schemed and dishonestly accrued to himself and doing it four-fold.

What will it mean for you? But you say, "My reputation." My friend, I want to use strong language but I won't. It would be injudicious. But take your reputation and consign it to the only place it belongs. What is your reputation? The son of God became of no reputation. The only One who had a reputation worth preserving gave it up and took the shame and ignominy of the cross. And then we cling to our reputation, and in so doing keep ourselves from the gracious provisions of such a loving Savior.

Here is the mandate for retribution, ineffectual in the case of Achan because of the hardening power of sin in general, because of the self-protective power of pride, and because of self flattery and vain conceit.

Oh Achan, may you find refuge in the Lord Jesus this morning.

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