

☉ Happy Father's Day. We come to a passage today that speaks to the Dad's; speaks to parents; speaks to every one of us. And today's message can be summed up like this, ☉ "Don't let an aching heart lead to an Achan home."

Last week we considered the fall of Jericho and the wisdom of God, and the victory afforded to Israel as they obediently followed God's directions – even when it didn't seem to make much sense. Imagine walking around the walls of a city every day, blowing a few trumpets, and then going back home to camp? "Mmmm! How many days will we keep doing this? This seems a little illogical. In fact, this is probably making us look a bit like fools who don't have a plan."

☉ You know, the world thinks that Christians are fools; fools for living the way we do; fools for believing the nonsense we do; fools for not enjoying the good stuff that life has to offer; fools for being prepared to be called fools. Remember though; that God says, **"The fool says in his heart, there is no God."** Two Psalms, both Psalm 14 and 53 begin with those words. **"The fool says in his heart, there is no God."** Proverbs 28:26 also says, **"Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe."** Suggesting that there is no God, and trusting in yourself makes you a double fool. I'd rather be considered a fool by the world, than by God!

So, our reading today speaks of Achan and his foolish actions. ☉ With the fall of Jericho, God gave explicit instructions that the city and all that was in it; buildings and animals, were to be devoted to God; the people were to be killed and everything destroyed; apart from any silver, gold, bronze and iron that was to go into the Lord's treasury. Otherwise, everything else was to be destroyed.

So, nothing was to be kept by the Hebrew people – Jericho was the first city to fall to the Israelites, and the city was like the first fruits offering being dedicated to God. You can read about this in Joshua 6. God comes first, and as He would win the battle for them, then the people needed to recognise Him and worship Him accordingly and in an appropriate manner. The first fruits of the Promised Land were to be devoted to God. I trust the first fruits of your income are dedicated to the Lord; you give first to the Lord and then live on the rest.

But in chapter 7 we read of their next conquest. Joshua, the Commander in Chief, sent in spies to scope out the next city of war: a city called Ai. It was not a city as we would define a city of thousands of people, but a township. When the spies returned they said that they would only need a very few men to overcome such a small city as Ai. So Joshua sent more than enough; a few thousand men to fight.

Things didn't go as expected and the men of Ai killed 36 of the Israelite warriors and chased the rest away. Joshua was broken hearted; he tore his clothes and fell to the ground in front of the Ark of the Covenant, pleading with God for understanding, help and wisdom. And so we read from v.10, in Joshua 7...

☉ **"The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? (In other words, "It's not you who needs to repent.) Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. 12 That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.**

13 “Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.’”

The following day, the people came before God by tribes, then clans and finally in family groups, and eventually Achan is singled out as being the one person responsible for sinning on behalf of the nation; and his sin has resulted in the death of 36 of his fellow soldiers. Potentially - 36 families now without a Dad; 36 wives without a husband, 72 parents grieving the loss of their son. Little wonder that Joshua was heart broken. And rightly so, he turns to and appeals to God.

When you are heart-broken for whatever reason, the only place to turn for understanding, wisdom and comfort is to the Lord. He wants to bring peace, comfort and understanding. He mends the broken hearted; He lifts up the shattered.

Now, when Achan is confronted by the prospect that he has sinned – he comes clean and confesses his sin. Unlike Adam and Eve who sought to lay the blame elsewhere, Achan admits his sin, and as they searched his tent they found a beautiful robe from Babylon, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, hidden, buried in the ground; within his tent.

Now, I don't know whether you realise it or not, but confessing ones' sin glorifies God. We tend to think that pointing people to God's blessings and His miracles, and His healing power, is the way to glorify Him. But in V.19, ☉ **“Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honour him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”** We give God glory and honour Him; we show that He is God and ought to be served truthfully and obediently in confession. So confessing our sin shows that we do honour and respect Him; confession glorifies Him.

What then follows is quite disturbing. ☉ V.24, **“Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. 25 Joshua 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. 26 Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger.”

Did Achan deserve to be killed? And maybe if he deserved some degree of punishment; did his family deserve to be killed along with him? Man, this seems unfair. And we get it that God does not tolerate sin and is angered by it – but you can't tell me that there weren't other sins going on in the Hebrew camp. Why single out Achan when sin abounds right throughout the camp?

And we wonder ...gosh, when I sin will I be forgiven or punished? If God's in a grumpy mood I just might get wiped out! And if others in my family are suffering, is that because of my sin? It's no wonder that people in Jesus day were asking the question, is this man blind because of his sin or the sin of his parents? Better be careful around God!

But we've come to know that this is not the way it is. As we read King David's words, ☉ **“You Lord are kind and forgiving – abounding in love to all who call upon you.”** (Ps 86) John wrote, ☉ **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 Jn 1:9) Again from Ps 130, ☉ **“If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, serve you with reverence.”** God is full of mercy – not giving us what we deserve; He is forgiving and abounding in love.

One wonders whether things would have been different had Achan come clean before being singled out. Maybe, if he had come before God in repentance, seeking forgiveness prior to being found out, then God may have forgiven him. But I believe that there is so much more to the problem of Achan's sin.

You see, Achan was tempted by the lure of fast money; or easy wealth. Achan had an ache in his heart that he felt would be fulfilled by a healthy bank account, and so he didn't just keep for himself wealth that was not for Him, but he stole from God. That which was to be devoted to God, through Achan's actions became devoted to Achan. Therein lies the problem.

What does your heart ache for? ☉ What sin do you seek to tolerate? What area does the Devil know that he only has to push "that button" and he knows you're vulnerable? Just because your heart aches for something doesn't mean that it's right, or that it needs to be satisfied. Don't let an aching heart lead to an Achan home; heading for destruction.

You see, the real problem with Achan's sin was not that he'd lied and stole and kept that which didn't belong to him, but that he took something that was to be dedicated to God for himself; in other words he was placing himself on the same level as God, in that he was dedicating to himself that which should have been dedicated to God; placing self in equal place with God. And God was angry!

As the leader of the family; ☉ the spiritual head of the home, to do so, had consequences on the rest of his family; everything connected with Achan was destroyed. And the lesson for the rest of the Hebrew people was clear; you must not seek to honour yourselves before you honour God. Honour God first! God comes first! Don't hold back from God your true worship! Don't hold back from God that which belongs to Him!

And for us - as the spiritual head of the family, men, fathers, you stand in a position of authority and leadership. For other families where there is no Dad, then a Christian Mum stands in that position of spiritual leadership and is responsible for the spiritual direction over the family.

Where a married couple are unequally yoked, then the Christian still stands under the authority of God and pleads on behalf of their family; seeking to represent God and allow the way that they live their lives to be a witness, with the hope that their loved ones might also come to respond to God's love.

And where parents are both non believers, then their spiritual leadership or lack thereof, follows that their children grow up with similar beliefs to themselves. We have an influence on others around us whether we like it or not, and parents have a spiritual responsibility in bringing up their children. So this message is to Dad's and parents, but is for all of us.

Now, God said to Joshua in v12-13, ☉ **"I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. There are devoted things among you. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them."** That which was to be devoted to God, through Achan's actions became devoted to destruction and needed to be removed. It was not to be taken back from Achan and re-devoted to God, but destroyed.

The history of the Temple in Jerusalem shows us that God doesn't care for buildings, gold or beautiful artworks dedicated to Him. If it is defiled and used to worship any other god it will be destroyed. God is Holy and will not be reduced to being "just another God."

Now, since Pentecost, the human heart has become the temple of the Holy Spirit. But "You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove anything that replaces your worship of God." In other words, whilst you are devoted to something else other than God, then your enemies will have their way over you. If not dealt with; footholds can become strongholds. Where there is sin in the camp it must be eradicated and forgiven.

Don't let an aching heart lead to an Achan home. Anything that vies for supremacy in your life - be it visible or invisible - represents an idolatrous throne. So, is there something that you give greater thought, time and energy to other than God? Is there something else that you are devoted to? You cannot serve two masters. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them; until we repent (we turn away) from our sin.

So, we praise God for the Cross... ☉ It is through Jesus death on the Cross that we are forgiven of our sin, as Jesus death paid the price for our sin. He was without sin yet died the sinner's death. ☉

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. For the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.” (1 Jn 1:8-9, 7)

If you know that you need to invite Jesus into your life to save you from sin and its punishment and power, then please speak to one of us and we'd love to help you do that. Alternatively you can go to this website ☉ (4laws.com) which has been translated into 165 languages – a site that helps you to understand what God has done for you through Jesus and how to become a Christ follower.

We're about to share together in communion – so I invite you to take the bread in your hand. As you do, let me read from Colossians 1.

☉ **“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”** (Col 1:19-22)

These verses tell us that Jesus was fully God and fully man, and through His work on the cross of Calvary, we have peace with God and we are declared righteous before Him. We have been reconciled with God, and are being made holy day by day as we respond obediently to Him; without blemish and free from condemnation and accusation.

☉ By Jesus physical body through death on the cross we are being sanctified; that is becoming holy – like Him. Praise God. Let's give thanks ... (Take the bread)

Through Jesus blood, shed on the cross we are reconciled through faith in Him to God. (Drink the cup)

On this Father's Day, we are grateful for the love of our Heavenly Father, Amen.

Let us stand and sing together of His love.

By His wounds we are healed, forgiven and set free.

Song: TN 213 How deep the Fathers love

