

# Don't Live The Compromised Life

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*Joshua*

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Turn with me then to Joshua 7 and to this sequel to the glorious battle of Jericho which shines like the full noontime sun in the history of Israel, a great, God-honoring and Joshua-exalting victory and yet it is followed by this dark night of a defeated Ai because of Achan's sin. Let me just say right at the outset that the whole question of the ban that God gave for the people to exercise on those things that they found in Jericho, when we were looking at it last week, something happened last week and I began talking about it and you see everything from the front, but when I began talking about it, explaining what the ban was in the Hebrew, the cherem, people just became visibly bored and just this kind of restlessness came over things and folk were looking around and saying, "What's all this about," and everything, and then all of a sudden and I thought things go through your head when you see people responding to what you're saying and it affects the way the you preach and I thought, "Oh, dear, I'd better wind this up quickly." I thought, "No, this is..." So I carried on preaching, if in doubt, shout louder, and just began to speak a little bit about how that pans out in the Christian life and at that point, everything changed and you looked completely different and from looking bored and shuffling around and that kind of thing, you were absolutely grabbed. Now, I think it was actually God who was grabbing us because I think that and Elizabeth said this through the week, that there is something that God is saying to us as a fellowship and I mean as a fellowship, because what happened at Ai was a communal thing; what happened because of Achan was a communal thing. Something blocked this sweeping life of the people of Israel. Sin blocked that life and if as a fellowship things have been going well up until Christmas, up until now, many things to encourage us, there is a block. There is a block.

Thursday lunchtimes we've been going out into Union Street from the steps here, when we first started it was great. A large group of people. We went out absolutely thrilled to bits. "Let's do this every week." So we did. This Thursday, three people. Saturday evenings started to go down before Christmas just the same way. Now, wonderfully, the sign-up sheets for the Tuesday's now that we're doing Tuesday's every week, are looking good but there is a principle in the Scripture which applies to a fellowship as much as it applies to an individual and the principle is, "Let him that thinks that he stand take heed lest he fall." But when you're encouraged and things seem to be going really well and

there is lots to point to that the Lord is doing, that's precisely the time when a fellowship is most vulnerable, when we as individuals are the most vulnerable.

But glorious defeat at Jericho. The whole city collapsed. Everybody done in, all the people of Jericho. Not a single Israelite killed and then the very next battle they come to, it's a disaster. So I want us to spend some time this evening looking at Achan's sin and its impact and seeing what lies at the heart of that sin and seeing how Achan got into that position so that we might learn as a fellowship and so that we might take heed when we think we're standing, lest we fall, so that we might not see all the wonderful things that are happening and forget that as we look out one way, figuratively speaking onto Union Street, then there is the devil who will come in the back door and who will bring us down from behind like when somebody comes up to you and just does that behind your knee and down you go. And it may be for some of us in our own lives the same thing is happening and what God has to put his finger on is something that we know about that has to go; something that we've accommodated; something that we've made room for; something that we've buried under the ground in our own tent and provided a home for.

So let's look at the passage and see what's going on, shall we? I just want to bring out some of the features of Achan's sin for us for a moment or two and then to look at one or two aspects of this passage. We're looking at the problem, this week we're looking at Joshua and his leadership in this situation, next week. The first thing is that Achan's sin was a progressive thing. It was a progressive thing. Achan didn't sort of wake up one morning thinking, "Oh good, battle of Jericho. This is the seventh day. We're going to march around it seven times. Big shout. Off we go in. Here's my chance to get some filthy lucre. Here's my chance to grab some loot here and hide it away so that when we get into the Promised Land, then I'm going to have an edge on everybody else and I'm going to have something to trade with and you know." He didn't wake up thinking that. He didn't wake up that morning and absolutely sure and thinking, "Now, how can I sin monumentally against God today?" He didn't think that and neither do we.

It was a progressive thing and if you want to understand the progress of Achan's sin in actual fact, before we look at the verbs that are used when Achan confesses his sin, you have to look way ahead to the book of James. It conveniently begins what the letter J as well and so if you want to do that with me, right away to the New Testament to James and to James 1 and if you've got one of our church Bibles you'll find that on page 1213. James 1 and James is writing to Christians who are facing a problem in that they are blaming God for their own sinfulness and they're blaming God that he is tempting them and he's making their life difficult for them and it's doing the absolute basic thing that we all do, we look for somebody else to blame and who better to blame than God because then you've really got complete carte blanche to do whatever you like, don't you? I mean, if it's God's fault, then you're absolutely totally in the clear.

So James says for people who are being tempted and who are being tried, verse 13, James 1, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when," here it comes, "by his own evil desire." So there is something in the heart which sees something that we

shouldn't have and because we shouldn't have it, we want it. It says don't walk on the grass so where do you want to walk? You want to walk on the grass. Somebody says, "Don't do something," you immediately want to do it precisely because they said, "Don't do it." There is something in us which James calls evil which has this sort of perverse desire to do that which God has said we shouldn't do and, of course, it comes as no surprise that we trace that right back to Genesis and we see it in Genesis 3 as we've been thinking on several occasions recently. So there is actually something in the human heart, not in heaven, but in the human heart which sees a prohibition of God, "Don't do it," and wants to do it precisely because God has prohibited it.

Next step, "he is dragged away and enticed." You see something which is not necessarily in itself wrong. You know that God doesn't want you to have it but you want it and then what happens is it kind of gets a little hook into you. You allow that hook in. You don't run away from it, you run towards it a little bit. So picture yourself like a fish in the river and you see this fly coming with a hook on the end and you think, "I'll just go for it," and you go and bite the hook deliberately. Well, that's the kind of thing that we're talking about, James is talking about here. We are enticed.

Now, Martin Luther famously said, "You cannot stop birds flying around your head but you can stop them building a nest in your beard," if you've got one. Hair would be fine, wouldn't it. That's going to be a problem for some, but never mind. Another bald joke. We know what he means by that. You walk down the street and you cannot help but see images which are designed specifically to tap right into your God-given sexuality. You cannot help but see that the car that is parked outside a building or whatever is a beautiful car, an absolutely drop-dead gorgeous Aston Martin, in case you were thinking what you'd buy me for Christmas. It is beautiful. For goodness sake, you'd have to be an absolute idiot to say it isn't unless you don't like cars at all, in which case you're fine. That's okay. Or you're working with somebody in your job and they are drop-dead gorgeous and you cannot avoid working with them and you can't ask God to make them ugly but there is an enticing in the heart. The hook is in. The bait that Satan is dangling has worked.

Third stage. His own evil desires; dragged away and enticed; "Then after desire has conceived," you do the thing. You reach out and take what you shouldn't take. You say yes and you engage with the temptation. At that point it ceases to be a temptation anymore, it becomes your practice.

Then fourth, after desire is conceived, this powerful and devastating imagery that James uses, after desire is conceived, "it gives birth to sin; and when sin is full-grown, it gives birth to death." You reach out and you say, "Yes." You engage in the temptation. You sin and the sin brings death.

Now, those are the stages of Achan's progressive sin. Look at the verbs that Achan uses in verse 21. Let's begin from verse 20. The spotlight has gone from a broad sort of floodlight thing to gradually more and more focused on Achan himself. Joshua said, "My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel. Give him the praise. Tell me what you have

done. Do not hide it from me." Achan replied, "It is true, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done. When I saw." Now, what he saw was a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels. There was nothing inherently wrong with the robe. It was a beautiful robe. The way to handle temptation is not to try and deny that the thing is what it is, that won't work, you see. The knowledge that something truly is attractive or beautiful or whatever will break through the veneer of denial.

He saw it. Now, he couldn't help seeing it. What was Achan supposed to do? All the guys rush in after the walls have collapsed; they rush in and they, you know, slay everybody left, right and center, is Achan supposed to go out with his eyes closed? Is Achan supposed to wander around like this, you know, just lashing out with his sword hoping it's not one of his own side? He can't help seeing it. Jericho is full of this kind of stuff. He can't help walking down the road seeing what's there.

He saw but then there is James's evil desire, isn't there? You see something you know you shouldn't have and something just rises up within you. You want it precisely because you shouldn't have it. Now, God has put a ban on these things, the cherem. These things are to be destroyed; they're not to take plunder for themselves. But he saw it. "I saw," verse 21. Then still the same verse, "I coveted." He was enticed in his heart and he conceived the sin, but he wanted the thing that was not his. He coveted it. Covetousness is the great sin of the heart. Covetousness has to do with what you love, what you really want. Covetousness is not the same as jealousy, covetousness is wanting what somebody else has got just because they've got it and you haven't.

So he coveted and then, still the same verse, "and took them," and it brought death. He saw nothing wrong with that. He couldn't help seeing. He coveted. It enticed the heart. From the heart flowed the action. He took. He has irrevocably involved himself with the sin. And that's how it goes with us, is it not, brothers and sisters? That's how it goes. Sometimes the seeing takes a long, long time, it's a repeated thing. Sometimes we go through this inner battle, "No, no, no," and yet secretly we know we're going to give in because we know we actually want the thing and we haven't crucified the desire and it may be months before we reach out and we take. Then it may be instantly or maybe a long time before something in us dies; some love for the Lord; some spiritual sensitivity; some desire to read his word; some instant responsiveness in prayer when we hear about things; some zeal for the Lord's name to be honored where we work; some desire to reach out with the Gospel to the people around us; some responsiveness which ??? We're having a quiz night in February and immediately thinks of people we can invite. That goes. It dies. And that death spreads cold fingers throughout all lives as Christians so after a while we have no real desire to go to church. We'll keep going for a while in the momentum but that can die out. Our Bibles lay unread. We get through a day and another day without spending any time at all praying. It never occurs to us whilst we're walking to work or sitting on the bus or whatever to be praying there. The desire is never there. It becomes reduced to something we've got to do, a task like Hoovering. Something dies in the face. Joy goes. It's a progressive thing.

Second, it is a covenant breaking thing. A covenant breaking thing. It's not too strong a phrase, no, it's not. Look at what God says about it in verse 11 of the chapter and then again in verse 15. Joshua is absolutely devastated. He is groveling on the ground. He's in an absolute state. He is falling like Jericho's walls fell. He's coming out with this prayer for God about his name and God's own great name and all of that, good words, but they're coming out just, you know, it's all wrong. I mean, it's almost ludicrous and the Lord says to Joshua, "Stand up." I mean, there is a place of prostrating yourselves, there's a place for groveling in the dust and all that kind of thing. This wasn't it. God says to Joshua, "Stand up. What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned, Bozo. It's obvious what's happened. You should know what's happened, Joshua. Get up and behave like a man and stop this groveling melodrama. Will you stand up? Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant."

Now, note that, this is what God says, they have not...God doesn't say, "They have disobeyed my command." Now, what is the difference between a command and a covenant in the Old Testament? What's the difference between commandments that come from God and the covenant that God forges with his people? It is that covenant is a relationship of love. A relationship of love which brings two people together. That's one of the things that makes a covenant different from a contract. That's one of the things that gets bandied around in controversies over Old Testament theology and, "Did God make a covenant or did he make a contract?" Well, I go for covenant. I don't think they are quite the same thing and I'm with W. J. Dumbrell on this one for those of you who know about that kind of thing. A covenant is a contract for this reason amongst others: you can contract to do something or to provide something which involves absolutely no relational development between you and the person of whom you made a contract beyond the contract itself so the contract is the relationship. But what God does with a covenant is to bring himself and his people together. When two people stand at the front of the church and they're getting married, they are in one sense contracting to marriage. It is contractual but what we say is that for as much as you have covenanted together in holy wedlock because there is nothing outside the relationship impersonal to the people; there is nothing which is not part and parcel of what it means to be these two people which is not coming together. They are not sort of agreeing to do something from which they can distance themselves and still do it, they are by the covenant brought together as people.

So this is not an agreement to do some sort of third party thing or to do some disconnected thing. They do not remain disinterested. It is a covenant that brings the two people together and that is what God is talking about here, God who said, "I will be your God and you will be my people." God who gave through the commandments the way in which they would be his people. God who took Israel who was wandering around, a small nation, and bound them to himself in a covenant of love because he loved them. This God counts what Achan did as a breaking, a violation of that covenant. Why? Because, you see, what Achan took was that which was devoted to a life that was lived for another god and what God wants his people to do is out of love for him, live lives which are totally devoted to him and to no other god.

Now, there is nothing about robes which says that robes from Babylonia are automatically devoted to another god but that's the way they were being used in Jericho. Ditto the silver and the gold. It was all devoted to the gods of Jericho and what God's people have to do was to say, "Because we love you so much, Lord, we're not going to have anything that belongs to devotion to other gods in our lives." They will wear robes, they will have gold and silver in the land, but it won't be the things that supported a life lived to an idol. So their devotion to God was to be so total out of love for him that it would not be mixed with that which was devoted to another god and what Achan did was not simply to disobey the command, he broke the love behind the command, compromised the love relationship, compromised the exclusive betrothal of the people to Yahweh, to Jehovah. And what they came up against, or Achan came up against, was the jealousy of God for his people and for his people's love.

The third, it is a disastrously spreading thing. Thirty-six men died. It was a humiliating defeat. Joshua is groveling in self-pitying bewilderment and faithlessness. All Israel, verse 11, Israel has sinned. All Israel is implicated. It was a disastrously spreading thing. Now, we find that difficult to cope with, don't we, in our individualized Western world? We are the cultural children of generations which developed and articulated and infused our culture with rampant individualism as Judge Robert Bork called it in his book "Slouching Towards Gomorrah." Rampant individualism.

So we find this difficult. We find it odd to think that, ??? Achan sinned, but God loved a people, not an amalgam of individuals who happened to be in the same place going in roughly the same direction. God loved the people. If I walk away from God, when I sin, do you know it affects you? It affects you. If I'm not right with God, if I don't keep short accounts with God and repent of my sin, if God when he lays his finger on something in my life that isn't right, if I resist that and bridle against it, then you lose because I stand before you and try and preach God's word when my heart's a million miles from God. Or I says, "Let's pray, shall we," always seem to add "shall we" on the end, I don't know why. ?? shall we, just carry on and pray anyway. Speaking to somebody I'm in rebellion against in front of you all, with you all. Or something that I hear about doesn't actually touch my heart. Fellowship suffers.

If we take the thing that Satan offers to us, any one of us, it spreads. The fellowship suffers when our zeal is killed off. The fellowship suffers when our joy is deadened by sin. The fellowship suffers when our responsiveness is just anesthetized by iniquity. The fellowship suffers in ways that we may hardly be aware of and could not predict and might not ever see. The fellowship suffers. We are a body. You stub your toe, your whole body knows. You get a piece of grit in your eye, your whole body knows and has to do something about it. We're a body. It makes a difference the Thursday lunchtimes. If we are letting sin in, it makes a difference to the singing on a Sunday if our hearts are called towards God. It makes a difference to the fellowship when somebody goes away who hasn't been spoken to because we've just been in a mood and we've been in a mood because we're out of sorts with God and we haven't come hungry for him and so we're not responsive to each other.

It happens in our own individual lives as well as the life of fellowship. I've been listening to somebody who, a girl that was on one of the beach teams when I was out in Wales, the United Beach Missions, and she was the head girl of her school and you would all know that schools in England, if you're a head boy or head girl ??? Scotland, I'm sure it's the same, you wield a power which the pope would be envious of. At our school, ?? school for boys, thugs actually, prefects were allowed to give detentions on Thursdays so when 1:30, it was found smoking a pipe on the back playing fields, we would just have an absolute field day. We couldn't get ?? Anyway, you have this power to, you know, really inflict it on people who were younger than you.

Anyway, this girl was head girl in the school and she enjoyed that sort of degree of power and authority and had found some pornographic magazines in the sixth form common room. She was a Christian. Now, she knew exactly what should happen to those magazines. She should have taken them and informed that teacher and thrown the things out and she didn't and something in her just resisted the good deed for a split second and that's all it took because then the resolve drained away and instead of putting them out, she gave the other people the appropriate punishment, thrashed to within an inch of their lives, and she kept them in her own desk. She was at one of those schools where the head girl had her own office, an entire suite with secretaries and everything else. She slipped them in the draw of the desk underneath some other stuff and kept them because she wanted them and she was talking about this because she was testifying to the fact that the blessing in inverted commas, whatever you want to call them, the blessing just drained out of her life and she knew what was happening. She knew what she'd done. She knew what was causing it. Eventually, when many things had gone wrong, I don't mean circumstances had gone wrong as if, you know, all difficult circumstances mean there's a sin to pin it onto, but what I mean is that in her own heart things went wrong, she took them and she burned them and she burned them, her life turned a corner and she was back with God. That happens, you see, in a Christian life. That's part of the dynamic because the love is wounded, the love between those and God. God is, can we put it like this, God is wounded. Paul talks about being able to quench the Spirit. Can you believe that? That we can quench the Spirit of God? Yes, we can and we do it by sin.

And it spread right throughout the whole camp. Everybody suffered and God said, "Israel has sinned." You can bet what it was like for Achan, this progressive thing, this covenant breaking thing, this spreading thing which started out as a secret thing and became an uncovered sin and ended up being a judged sin. You can imagine what it was like for Achan as the role call happened. Defeated Ai. Achan might have made absolutely no connection between the 36 dead men and their families, their wives and their children mourning the loss and wailing and the burials having to take place. Achan might have made no connection in his head between that and what was buried in his tent and then Joshua announces that the people have got to consecrate themselves and then when morning comes, verse 14, "present yourselves tribe by tribe." And you can imagine what it was like. Verse 16, "Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes." Achan is saying, "What is all this about? What's going on here."

Head teacher to our school once called an assembly, a special assembly of the whole school one afternoon. "What's going on here?" He stood up in front of the whole school and said, "I've come to warn you about the dangers of Zoff" Nobody had ever heard of Zoff. Zoff is a detergent and people had been sniffing it and one pupil at another school had died from sniffing Zoff. Nobody had ever heard of Zoff until that moment. From that moment on, everybody wanted to find some Zoff. It's an assembly, "What's this about?"

Well, Israel came forward by tribes, "and Judah was taken." Imagine Achan, what was going on. "The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken." The whole thing is focusing in. What is going on now in Achan's heart? "Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken." Games up. You see, Achan thought it was secret but God saw it. Achan thought he had covered it up. You can't cover it up from God. And so it ended up a judged thing.

You see, God knows when our hearts are not right with him. God sees sin. Psalm 66:16 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Galatians 6:7-8 says, "God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man shall sow, that shall he also reap." What do we need in the Christian life from time to time? What do we need as a fellowship from time to time? We need what the old ones used to call the mortification of sin, the putting to death of sin in our lives. Mortification is painful. Mortification is initially a matter of shame. Mortification means saying no to something which still seems to be deep within us. Mortification has to happen through an absolute gauntlet, running a gauntlet of falsifications for carrying on sinning. "Oh, everybody else does it. Oh, there's nothing wrong with it. Oh, surely it's not a huge problem. Oh, surely it's not a great sin. Oh, I do other good things." But from time to time, dear brothers and sisters, mortification is absolutely vital for a fellowship and for the work of God and for the honor and name of God and for the well-being of our own souls.

Do I know what I'm talking about this evening? Yes and no. I don't know what God is saying to you. I don't know what God might be putting his finger on in your life. I do know that if God has put his finger on it, do not go out of this church this evening without resolving before God to put that thing out of your life. For your sake and for ours, put it to death.

Let's pray.