

Scripture reading. Josh. 6:17, 7:1, 10-26.

theme: The danger of secret sin.

Dear congregation of Jesus Christ: each of us is an example. Either we show the results of God's gracious work in our lives, or we show what happens when we live for ourselves, we don't submit to God, and we don't want Him to control our lives. Each of us is an example, either of a godly life or of an ungodly life. Which kind of example are you? In the bible, we have stories of people designed to teach us as negative examples, examples to warn us. In Luke 17, when Jesus was teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, He told His disciples not to return to their homes when they saw the Romans coming. In Luke 17:32, Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife." Besides negative examples, designed to warn us, from scripture, we also have positive examples, designed to teach us. Listen to Heb 13:7 "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." This is a calling to follow the example of office-bearers, to follow them as they follow Christ. (blank) we have an opportunity to learn from Achan's negative example, and we will seek to learn about Jesus, since all of the Scriptures testify about Him. Achan's story teaches us about the danger of secret sin. By the time we finish, I hope you will agree, that God teaches us about the danger of secret sin through Achan's negative example.

The Israelites got up early in the morning for six days in a row. Each day they marched around Jericho, the first Canaanite city they wanted to conquer. The priests carried the ark, and some of them sounded trumpets 喇叭 made of ram's horn. Besides the sound of the trumpets, the only sound that was heard was the sandals 凉鞋 of the Israelites on the ground outside Jericho; the people were silent. On the seventh day, according to God's instruction through Joshua, the people got up even earlier, they marched around Jericho seven times, and when Joshua told them to, they shouted. The walls of Jericho fell down, and the Israelites rushed into the city. Joshua gave direction to the people about the city of Jericho; we read them earlier from Joshua 6. Jericho was devoted to the Lord. God commanded Israel to kill the people and animals in the city. What was Israel to do with the property, the homes, and valuable possessions they found in the city? Read along in Joshua 6:18-19, and we'll learn. "And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. 19 "But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated 神圣的 to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD." Only the vessels of gold, silver, and iron were to be spared. They were to be given to the Lord. Everything else was to be destroyed, probably gathered together and burned. Every Israelite heard these words. Achan heard them too.

Let's learn about the path to secret sin from Achan's story. What is the root of secret sin? It's an idol heart. Maybe you say, "we don't see a word about idols in the story of Achan. He didn't bow down to images or worship in sacred groves 木偶." Yet Achan was involved in false religion, and it cost him his life. Achan was a materialist; he worshiped his property, his possessions instead of God. In chapter 7:24, where Achan's execution is described, we read about "his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had." Achan was a wealthy man; he was not motivated to steal by poverty. Scripture is clear, congregation, it is not a sin to be wealthy. Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, and the women who ministered to Jesus were wealthy. When wealth becomes god, when the desire to become wealthy dominates your life, that's when sin comes. Paul says this so much better than I could. Listen to his words to Timothy from 1 Tim. 6:9-10. "But those who desire

to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Congregation, Achan had many possessions, but they were his god. he stole from the Lord because getting property was more important to Achan than obeying the Lord. Our hearts are idolatrous by nature. We were born idol makers and idol worshippers; and our old nature is still motivated in this way, even as we live as Christians. beware of the root of secret sin; your and my sinful old nature.

As we consider the path to secret sin, not only is there a root of this sin, but there are assumptions which lead to this sin. There are three assumptions which lead to secret sin. the first is "No one saw me do it." Listen, private sinner, secret sinner; the truth is the best way to defeat a lie. Here the truth of God's Word which comes to throw down this assumption. You may say, "No one sees me when I am alone" but God is everywhere, and he sees everything. Maybe Achan looked all around before he stole in Jericho. Maybe he thought, "I'm safe, no one sees me." But Achan didn't look up; he didn't think of God, the unseen seer.

Friend, when you sinned did you think of god, or did you forget Him? he saw what you did, He knows what you thought. Fellow-believers, you and I live before the face of God. he sees us. What a foolish thing sin is! We sin before the eyes of the God who sees all things; we sin before the god who knows the thoughts of all people in all places all the time. Since god knows about your sins, they are not secrets any more. Does that drive you to repentance again, dear Christian; will that lead you to first-time repentance, unbelieving secret sinner?

The second assumption is “If no one knows about it, it’s not wrong.” Perhaps this is something children or young people might say. We already know that god knows about what you do; and you know that it is wrong when you sin. God has written His law on your conscience, and your conscience accuses you when you do wrong. You know how it speaks after you have sinned. Friend, it is a bad sign when your conscience moves from first accusing you and then excusing you for the same sinful action. God knows your sins, and they are not secret, and you know that the sins you do in private are sinful and wrong.

Thirdly, secret sinners say, “no one is hurt by what I do, so it’s not wrong.” Perhaps Achan thought “This beautiful cloak from Babylon is going to be burned anyway. Since it’s going to be destroyed, I might as well take it; no one will miss it; no one will be hurt if I take it.” We will return to the impact of Achan’s sin, but for now remember that others were hurt by Achan’s sin. as a result of Achan’s sin, thirty-six Israelites died in the first battle for Ai. All sins have consequences. Immorality 不道德 does so much harm. It does great damages to marriages. Watching immorality is addictive; it changes the way the brain functions, and it impacts the expectations of those who use it. Others are impacted by the immorality that happens between men and between women. The Greek word for these sins is porneia, from which the English word pornography comes. People who continue in these sins will go to the bottomless pit and the lake of fire. It is wrong to speak explicitly of these shameful things. Paul says that these shameful things are done in secret. They are secret sins, and the assumptions for secret sin don’t stand up to the light of day and the light of god’s Word.

The path to secret sin begins with the root of an idolatrous heart, it continues with assumptions, and it ends in the practice of secret sin. Achan’s sin followed a very familiar pattern. In his confession in 7:21, this is what Achan says. “When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them.” Imagine Achan, either going through the city, or else looking at the valuable things taken from the city. He sees the beautiful robe, the silver money, and the bar of gold. Remember, property is his god. For Achan, the step between seeing and desiring is very small. Soon he longs for these precious things. They are for god, but Achan wants them more than he has ever wanted anything. Achan decides that if he has what he wants, he will be happy. So Achan reaches out and takes the robe, the gold, and the silver.

Congregation, do you think Achan was happy after he took these things? The Bible gives us reason to believe that Achan wasn’t happy. As soon as he had these stolen goods, he had to hide them. he dug a hole in the ground in the center of his tent, and he hid the cloak 外衣, the gold and silver. He couldn’t wear those stylish clothes, someone might ask him where he got them. he couldn’t spend the money or turn it into jewelry. Again, someone would notice and ask where it came from. Secret sin won’t bring lasting happiness. yes, there might be a little pleasure, but lasting misery follows secret sin. If Achan were here today, he would say that secret sin brings no lasting pleasure. This is what his story says; this is what God wants us to learn from Achan’s story. But I would ask each of you, congregation, have you learned this lesson? Have you learned by sad experience that there is no lasting joy for those who commit secret sin. People might think of you as an upright person; you might do certain things to give people that impression; yet you love one particular sin; you are mastered by one kind of sin. You are living a double life, and in your heart, you know it ought not to be so. God knows it too, friend; you can’t hide anything from him.

From Achan’s story, we have learned about the path to secret sin. Notice secondly, that Joshua 7 teaches about the public and secret sin. Secret sins affect the public. This becomes clear from the first verse of Joshua 7. There we read, “But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.” Admittedly, there is something very difficult for us to understand here. This verse says that the children of Israel trespassed because Achan took property devoted to God. As a result, God was angry, not at Achan, but at Israel. Any explanation we give must fit within the framework of Scripture. As we consider the public impact of secret sin, notice that the covenant community suffers as a result of secret sin. God treated Achan, not as an individual, but as a member of the covenant community. Achan was born into a family from the tribe of Judah. He heard the law of God. he saw the sacrifices and how they pointed to the way of

salvation in the future. he saw the power of god in opening the way through the Jordan River and flattening the walls of Jericho. God judged Achan in view of these covenant blessings. God judged him in his relationship to the children of Israel. Scripture is clear; not all Israel was punished in the way that Achan and his family were punished; yet the Israelites were greatly impacted by Achan's sin. So it is with us, congregation. God will judge us in view of our relationships to others. Jesus said that much would be required of those who had received much. God will judge you as a member of this church or a visitor to this church. He will ask me whether I lived according to the sermon I preached. He will judge you as a father, a mother, a child, an employer, an employee, a student, a teacher. He will judge you according to the way you related to Him and the way you related to others. In short, God will ask, did you love the Lord your god with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Did you love your neighbor as yourself? All of our actions, all of our words, all of our thoughts, all of our secrets will be judged by God's law. None of us can say, "I have kept God's law in every way all the time." Since we can't keep the law, do you have someone who can keep the law for you?

The story of Israel's first attack on Ai explains how God deals with the public because of Achan's secret sin. Joshua doesn't ask the Lord for a battle plan against Ai. it seems Joshua knew Ai was a small city. Jericho, that was a God-sized project, but Israel could handle Ai on their own. The spies who scouted Ai said that two or three thousand soldiers could defeat the city. Joshua sent out three thousand men, and the Israelites were defeated. Thirty-six Israelite soldiers were killed, and the army of Ai chased the Israelites from the battlefield. Achan's sin had consequences for the covenant community of Israel. God is clear, he does not punish one person for the sin of someone else. God acts justly in all that he does. God doesn't answer to us, congregation; we answer to Him. How do you respond to these verses? Do you respond in rebellion, saying that you don't like that god, and that you can't accept this cruelty and vindictiveness 恶意? Are you afraid to ask the hard questions, do you ignore these kinds of passages of Scripture that trouble you? Or do you submit to this passage and to the God who inspired it. when your mind can't understand the infinity of God's justice, do you take comfort that whatever God does is holy and right?

As long as Achan's secret sin was not exposed and dealt with, God would not bless His people. This is what God tells Joshua in chapter 7:11-12. "'Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed 违反 My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. 12 "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accused from among you.'" As long as Israel continued in the way of secret sin, God would not go with them, and they would be defeated by their enemies. What about us, congregation, could we be confusing stagnation with success? Could we be satisfied with attracting visitors from other churches and not having unchurched people attend? Is the community of (blank) a better place because this church is here? Could it be that God is withholding His blessing because anyone is living in secret sin. God has promised to bless those who obey Him. it was true of Israel, and it is true today. God doesn't need us, congregation; His Name and His justice will be honored even if Israel is defeated by her enemies. God's will is that His people should be holy. Is that your focus, fellow-believers, not being as worldly as possible, but being as holy as possible? Could it be that the church is as powerless in North America and the west because we are not consumed by what matters to God? Secret sin has public consequences. Young people can tell if there is a hollowness to someone's words; there is a disconnect between what someone says and how he or she lives. It's true, you and I can't save anyone, but we can be an influence in leading someone to go to st. Yes, secret sin is that dangerous, that serious, congregation.

Thirdly, God teaches us that there is punishment for secret sin. God tells Joshua how to discover the secret sinner. Israel is to sanctify themselves. They were to purify themselves physically and spiritually. The next morning, the people gathered to learn why Israel had lost to the small army of Ai. it seems that Joshua used the method of casting lots. There is much that we don't know about this process. Urim and Thummim were objects used to reveal god's will. First, Joshua cast lots between the tribes of Israel; and Judah was chosen. Then Joshua cast lots between the main families of Judah, and the family of the Zarahites, the descendants of Zerah was chosen. When Joshua cast lots between smaller family units, the household of Achan's father Zabdi was chosen. When Joshua cast lots among the household of Zabdi, Achan was chosen! Imagine the fear of Achan. Perhaps he began to wonder when Joshua gathered the people. How his incredulity must have turned to concern when Judah was chosen; and how fear and dread and terror must have risen as the Zarahites, the house of Zabdi, and finally he was chosen. And there he stood alone, exposed with all the eyes of the people fastened on him.

At this point, you might be wondering, "was Achan converted? It looks hopeful that he confessed his sin to God. Can we know whether Achan was saved or not?" Scripture doesn't tell us whether Achan was saved; and the wisest thing we can do is

not to speculate, but to learn from what God has revealed. It was good that Achan confessed his sin. He confesses that God is just in punishing him. But there are two reasons to be concerned with Achan's confession. First, Achan was compelled to confess. There he was, in front of the nation, caught, singled out by the providence of God. In verse 19, Joshua gently asks him, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." Then Achan makes confession. How much better it would have been if he had confessed when Joshua gathered the people together. Instead of confessing the sin of theft, Achan added the sin of deceit as long as he hid the stolen property. God is most glorified by willing confession that comes from the heart. Second, Achan minimizes his sin. He describes it this way in verse 21. "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it." In the Hebrew, Achan emphasizes the numerical value of the silver and the gold. Achan doesn't speak about the sinfulness of his sin; he doesn't ask the Lord for mercy. We don't know whether his confession came from his heart or his mouth.

Achan will receive a fair trial. Joshua sends men to search for the stolen goods. They enter Achan's tent, they dig in the center of the tent, and they find the cloak, the gold, and the silver underneath. The men return to Joshua carrying the cursed things. Then Achan, his family, and all his possessions are taken to a valley outside the camp of Israel. Achan and his family are stoned to death by the Israelites. Then their bodies and all Achan's possessions, including the stolen goods are burned. The Israelites pile large stones on the ashes. They give this valley a new name in order to remember what happened there. They call it the Valley of Trouble. Before he died, Joshua spoke to Achan, saying, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." Achan's name means trouble; Achan's sin troubled Israel, and Achan's sin brought trouble on his own head. Achan was not the only one who sinned. His family also knew about this sin, and they said nothing. Perhaps they thought that they would benefit from Achan's theft. God gives us an explanation of this process in Deuteronomy 24:16. "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin." Secret sin brings God's punishment, if not in this life, in the life to come, if not on the person of Jesus Christ, in your own person, secret sinner.

Although there is much reason for sorrow in what we have learned, much reason to search our hearts and to repent of secret sin; there is a hopeful word; a word of pardon for secret sinners. Notice what is written in the middle of verse 26, after the execution of Achan and his family. "So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger." In verse 1, we read that God's anger burned against Israel because of Achan's sin. Although we may not say that Achan in his sin is a type of Christ; we can say that there is a wonderful similarity with the way that God deals with sin. Just as God was angry with the sin of Achan, so His righteous response to our sin is anger. Yet God has made a way so that Jesus would be punished for the sins of believers, and God's anger would be turned away from us. That's what we confess in the form for the Lord's supper. "...the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than it should go unpunished) He has punished the same in His beloved Son Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross." Just as God's anger was turned away from Israel when Achan was punished, so God's wrath is turned away from everyone who believes in Jesus. We deserve to be punished for our secret sins in this life and the next, but in His mercy, God receives us graciously for Jesus' sake. Only through Jesus Christ and His perfect sacrifice will God's anger be turned away from us. Yes, there may be consequences for our secret sin. There may be shame and sorrow when that sin is exposed; but how much better it is that these things should happen in this life, compared to everlasting shame and contempt of hell. How much better it is to be forgiven for our sins, to be taught and changed through the consequences of sin, than to continue in secret sin with its guilt and fear in this life, only to face the eternal wrath of God in the second death. Secret sinner, in Jesus there is forgiveness for all of your sins, freely offered to you. Oh that you would seek it and find it in Him! Amen.