

## Weekly Reflection – Joshua 7: “What’s your perspective?” And “How sensitive are you?”

### “God that seems overly severe.”

I think when we’re honest and we hear this story in Joshua 7 it can feel a bit disturbing. This one guy takes a robe, some silver and gold, from the dead enemy, and he hides it. And because of this one sin he’s brought out in front of everybody, and he and his family are taken outside the camp, people pick up rocks and they stone him, and then they burn him. Doesn’t that seem like God is a little overly severe here?

Not only is Achan and his family stoned to death, but we see in verses 11-12 that Israel has been defeated by Ai because of Achan’s sin. Because of the sin of Achan in taking the robe, gold, and silver; Israel is defeated, and 36 men are killed. God is saying because of that sin you were defeated, My presence was not with you.

It’s passages like this in Joshua 7 that, to be honest, can cause us to think that God is overreacting. That He’s being unfair. Don’t we sometimes think Scripture is a little over the top?

Remember in Genesis 19 when Lot and his wife are fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah and God says, “Don’t look back.” What does Lot’s wife do? She looks back and what happens? All of a sudden, she turns into a pillar of salt. Gone. For a glance back. All she did was glance and she’s gone.

Look in Numbers 15. There’s a man who’s caught picking up sticks on the Sabbath. They bring him before God and ask, “What shall we do?” What does God say? “Stone him. Stone him for picking up sticks.”

2 Samuel 6, Uzzah reaches out just to grab the ark to keep it from falling. As soon as he touches the ark, what happens? He falls over dead on the spot. Just because he touched the ark, trying to keep it from falling.

Some people think, “That’s just Old Testament; God doesn’t do that in the New Testament.” Well, on the contrary, in Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira are giving their offering in the church. They lie and what happens? Both fall over dead.

1 Corinthians 11, Paul is writing to a local church and instructing them on communion and tells them the reason some of you have gotten sick and some died was because you took the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner.

So, let’s just be honest. We read these stories, and don’t we think, “Isn’t God overdoing this here? Isn’t this overly severe? I mean, yes, they sinned. I get that, but is that the punishment they deserve?”

### God is just.

It’s at this point people all across our culture and maybe some who are reading this, begin to point the finger at God and say, “I can’t worship a God who says those kinds of things. I can’t worship a God who does those kinds of things. That’s evil of God. That’s not just of God; that’s not right of God.” Many in the church no better than to say that so we just ignore passages like these or just shrug our shoulders and say we should just talk about grace and love. But the truth is that if we don’t understand God’s perspective on sin and justice we will never really understand grace and love.

***“For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:3-4 ESV)*** This means God’s perspective on sin is infinitely right. It is infinitely just. This means that everything God does is just and right. The reason we could hear those accounts and think God is not fair, that was unjust; is due to a wrong perspective of sin on our part, not God’s. The Word of God is very clear that God is just, that God can only do what is just. So, if we view those actions by God

as unjust than it's you and I who have the wrong perspective and need a God centered perspective on sin.

Here is a key to help understand this. It is not how severe we think the sin is. The key is the One Who has been sinned against. If you sin against a rock, you're not very guilty. If you sin against a man, you're guilty. But if you sin against an infinitely holy God, you are infinitely guilty. Even one sin. The issue is not how big or small the sin is. The issue is who is sinned against. If you sin against God, you are infinitely guilty because He is infinitely worthy, and He is infinitely worthy of every single ounce of your worship, every single second of your worship, and so one sin, no matter how small against an infinite God is infinitely offensive in His sight and deserves infinite punishment.

We need a radically God-centered perspective of sin. Often, we view sin in one way and God views sin in an entirely different way. We need to view sin not according to 21st century American culture, we need to view sin like God views sin, He is the Just Judge.

#### God's perspective on sin is essential for victory.

I want us to see that having a God centered perspective on sin is essential to living in the freedom, the victory, and the promises of God. To do that let's put this chapter in context to see it a little more clearly.

The first 6 chapters of Joshua are incredible. Everything is going great. In chapter 1, you've got God's promises to Joshua, some solid promises, "Don't be afraid Joshua, I'm with you, be strong, be courageous, I'm with you wherever you go." We read chapter 2 and see Joshua send spies into Jericho, they meet Rahab the prostitute and discover that the enemy is already scared of them. Chapters 3 and 4 tell us they cross over the Jordan River in a miraculous way. When the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant (the presence of God) step into the flooded Jordan River the water piles up in a heap and they cross over on dry ground. In chapter 5 we read that Joshua is at Jericho, and he encounters the Commander of the Army of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Jesus. Chapter 6 tells us how they defeat the walled city of Jericho. They are instructed to march around Jericho 13 times, play trumpet songs, and then shout the last time around, and the walls will fall. By faith, they are obedient, and God is faithful, and the walls fall flat. Not one Israelite dies in chapter 6, incredible victory. Everything is going great for 6 chapters. Last verse of chapter 6: ***"So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land."***

What we may expect, and I think what Israel expected was to walk right through the promised land with victory after victory. What is the first word in chapter 7? "But." But is a term of contrast and in this context is very striking for here we see a complete reversal of direction going from Israel's incredible victory to Israel's shameful defeat, from a supernatural success to a natural, fleshly disaster.

***"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things..."*** What are these devoted things that we see mentioned here? Go back one chapter to chapter 6. ***"But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord." (Joshua 6:18-19 ESV)*** We see that is exactly the sin that Achan commits. ***"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel." (Joshua 7:1 ESV)*** First 6 chapters we see God's with them, God's with them; chapter 7, but the people of Israel sinned, and God's anger burned against them. Again, I want us to see that having a God centered perspective on sin is essential to living in the freedom, the victory, and the promises of God.

What happens to Israel now? ***"Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, 'Go up and spy out the land.' And the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, 'Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three***

***thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.”***  
***(Joshua 7:2-3 ESV)*** Ai shouldn't be a problem for us, there's just a few of them. We just defeated the great walled city of Jericho by walking around it. ***“So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.”*** ***(Joshua 7:4-5 ESV)*** Do you see the seriousness of having a God centered perspective on sin, to being sensitive to sin, to dealing with sin in our lives. They are having victories, experiencing the miraculous provision of God, then sin in the camp and they experience defeat by little Ai. God's presence is with them, in fact God has promised to be with them, then sin in the camp, and we read in verse 12, ***“I will be with you no more...”***

God takes sin very seriously and it doesn't really matter if you and I like that or not. One of the main purposes for Joshua 7 is to help us have a God centered perspective of sin, to heighten our sensitivity to sin in our lives. God's reason for wanting this is because He wants us to live in victory. He's not just trying to scare us by showing us how severely He punishes sin. He's trying to get us to view sin from His perspective, to see the seriousness of one sin in our lives, to make us sensitive to sin so we don't take it casually and then live in defeat. These accounts are here because God wants us to deal with sin so that we can live in His victory.

#### A Hope filled word.

There was a word we read from verse 12 that is an amazing hope and grace filled word. It's a word that points to the truth that God does not want us to live in defeat, that God does want to be with us, that He does want us to live in His presence, in His promises, in His victory. That word is “unless.” ***“I will be with you no more, UNLESS you destroy the devoted things from among you.”*** ***(Joshua 7:12b ESV)*** That word gives hope, there is a way God can be with us, there is a way we can have victory. ***“Destroy the devoted things among you.”*** That means confession, repentance, destroying sin in our lives. We confess it and we repent of it, and we destroy it with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Dan Tabolt said, “Obedience is a doorway into the wonderful things of God.” Will we, will you, walk through the door of obedience. It requires confession, Godly repentance, a willingness to destroy sin in your life. When we surrender our desire to be judge and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal any sin that's taken up residence in our lives, and confess, repent, and destroy that sin we will experience the presence of God, the victory of God, the promises of God in our lives.