

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021**  
**Joshua 7:1-15**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Let us come to God in prayer before we think about His word.

Come Holy Spirit, soften our hearts to the Word of God.

Come Holy Spirit, lead us in the way of holiness.

Come amongst us Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus name, Amen.

Beginning this Saturday, the Church of Scotland will meet in General Assembly to debate and decide upon our collective life. There's much that's going to be on the agenda for the five days of debate including issues like presbytery planning, how many ministers we can afford, how the calculations are made of what each congregation pays into the central funds, and much more besides, and there's one particular issue that they'll be debating that I'll come back to later today.

However, this is our final week in the early chapters of Joshua and at first we might think 'Well these are just the same themes and issues as last week Scott, why bother with us?' but kind of like the two sides of a coin, we might say that if last week in the story of Jericho we saw the eternal impact of sin, that we all fall short of the glory of God and so we all need a Savior, then the other side of the coin is in today's account of Achan that focuses more on immediate issues and impact of sin and what we might do about it.

In our kids message this morning we were thinking about that core Biblical truth that God calls us into relationship with Himself. That is what the heart of what it means to follow Jesus. That's why God created the world enough in the first place, and it's why He sent His son to die for us, that our relationship with God might be restored.

Jesus Himself said "Now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." It's all about relationship. It's not about buildings, it's not about an organization or a denomination, it's not even about morals and old stories. At its heart Biblical faith is about relationship with God, but when we come to Joshua chapter 7 I suspect it jars with us again. Yet at its heart, this story is about relationship. Sadly the breaking of relationship, the breaking of trust with God, and we see that in relation to what Achan does in verses 1 and 15 where we read "but the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things. Achan took some of them. The Lord said to Joshua, whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done an outrageous thing in Israel."

There are two parts here that I've highlighted in blue that speak of that broken relationship, that broken trust.

The first is 'unfaithful', the second 'outrageous thing', and in the original Hebrew, in both cases, it speaks of disloyalty, infidelity even, and so we can describe sin as more than doing something wrong.

Key to understanding what is so troubling about sin is that it is breaking trust with God, it is being disloyal to Him, breaking the most holy of relationships such that God sees it as akin to infidelity.

Achan broke that trust when he kept for himself some of the silver and gold that was to be given to the Lord from the conquest of Jericho. That was a commandment that God had given in chapter 6 before Israel even set out against Jericho, and yet Achan chose to disregard that command, he chose to break trust with God.

Now Achan was not the only one, in chapter seven, to have done that. We see a measure both in Joshua and the spies. Actually, in the book of Numbers, we read the instructions that God gave to Joshua of how the conquest of Canaan was to be undertaken. God said, Joshua is to stand before the priest who will obtain decisions for Him by inquiring of the Lord and yet, in what we read, there's no mention of Joshua doing it, he acts of his own initiative, he fails to follow the command of God and that too is a breaking of trust, and maybe he did it because of overconfidence. Likewise, the spies came back from scouting out the next location and they encouraged Joshua not to send the whole army because only a few thousand are needed Joshua so, so, why send the whole army, and again we might say that this is an overconfidence of self-sufficiency and, as one commentator said, that too is a lack of faith, a lack of trust, to say 'Well I can deal with it on my own God. No need to seek You. No need to have Your presence with us symbolized in the Ark.'

Now, Achan does face the greatest of consequences and we might wonder if that was fair, yet the consequences were spelled out beforehand for him, and we know that some sins, certain choices, carry greater consequences even in our day as well. In all three ways there is the breaking of trust, a breaking of relationship that leads to consequences.

In this account, we see that the failure to trust God and ultimately it is a failure to trust His goodness. Achan doesn't trust God to provide for him and meet his needs, and so he covets this wealth, he steals, he lies and it just spirals, and likewise with the spies in Joshua, it's their self-confidence, of this idea that is so often in humanity, that 'I'm not going to trust God's goodness, I'm not going to trust that he knows what is best, I'm just going to go alone, to sins, to break trust with God. And begin in the garden of Eden, right through history, we just break that trust again and again, because we don't trust that God knows best, and we think we know what's best, and so we disregard what God has said, And I wonder, friends here and at home, is there an area of your life, an area of our church life, locally, nationally, where we are breaking trust with God? Is there a choice we've made and keep making or do nothing to set it right, and we know it's against God's way and His commands, and maybe we do that because, as I say, at

some level, we each think we know what's best and we don't trust that God is good enough.

Maybe it's in your relationships at home, maybe it's in how we spend our money or our time, it could be simply the things we choose to look over, because we don't deem them important enough.

Friends, is there an area of your life and our life together, where we are breaking trust with God, if there is, there are consequences, because there's always consequences to sin.

In Israel's day the impact of sin is just manifold. We read in verse 1 that the first consequence is that the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and that's not something we like to think about or talk about very much, but let's remember that to sin is to break trust, it's to commit infidelity in God's eyes, and so in the New Testament we read of God being grieved such that, when we disobey God, our Heavenly Father feels sorrow, He is even displeased.

For Israel, a knock-on effect was that they were defeated and they were derailed from God's purposes. We read in verse 12 that "the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies for I the Lord will not be with you anymore unless and until God's people restore their ways" and the defeat they experience leads on to another consequence, that the hearts of the people melted in fear and became like water, and we gloss over that, but it's noteworthy, because earlier in Joshua, in chapter 2, it's the same phrase that is used of the Canaanites, and so, we see that another consequence of sin is that God's people become indistinguishable from the surrounding nations.

Sin has consequences friends, it grieves God, it derails us from his purposes, and it makes us indistinguishable from others.

Now, there are differences between how God relates to us and the Old Testament, His people in the Old Testament, how He relates to us today, because ancient Israel came under the Old Covenant but we are reconciled to God through the New Covenant in Jesus, and so in the Old Testament God related to His people as a single nation, it was a single nation under God, but that is not how He relates to His church today.

In the Book of Acts, which we've been reading as part of our New Testament reading Plan, we probably came to the story of Ananias and Sapphira and went 'Wow God, what did you do there?' and it's actually a really similar story to what we read about with Achan, but in that story only Sapphira and Ananias suffer consequences, there's no mention of anybody else, there's no mention of God withdrawing from the church, but nevertheless, at the very least, individual Christians are affected by sin, and when a couple or a family or a group of Christians choose a path contrary to God's ways then, individually, and most often together, we face consequences, and Jesus warns us about this he says "I am the vine you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you

will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love.”

Notice how it links together; to remain in Jesus is to remain in His love, and we remain in His love by keeping His commands,

and when we don't, when we go our own way, it doesn't break that relationship, because nothing can now, but it creates distance, and it reduces our fruitfulness, and the New Testament fruitfulness is both growing in the character of Jesus and it's seeing our labors flourish for His glory, Sin has consequences it grieves God, it makes us indistinguishable from others and it derails God's purposes for our lives.

Friends, if we are choosing a way contrary to God's ways, maybe today is the day when God just wants to get your attention and to spell out the consequences, uncomfortable as that is, simply to call you closer to Him because He loves you. He wants life for you. Jesus said “I come that you may have life and have it to the full” and I realized that this passage, we'd rather not have this message, but he wants the best for you and that means walking close to Him and when we choose ways that are other than His it creates distance and He wants you back close to Him again because He loves you enough to die for you.

At the start I mentioned that the Church of Scotland is meeting in General Assembly next weekend and one of the issues up for debate is that of same-sex marriage. Now, I know that under your last Minister this raised a whole load of issues and consequences and today is not the time or place to go into old arguments, but as you're beginning to know I prefer my cards on the table, so you may as well know that I am not supportive of the church conducting same-sex marriage, because I don't see a Biblical basis for it and if the General Assembly never run the future votes in favor of allowing same-sex marriage to be conducted within the church then I'm of the opinion that that's a choice which breaks trust with God. I believe it would grieve God. It would make us indistinguishable from our culture and it would derail us from His purposes and the fruitfulness He'd wish to bring in our day and some of us, should the Church of Scotland allow same-sex marriage to be conducted by ministers, then there will be questions whether they can remain a part of this congregation or any congregation within the denomination, and a passage like today which speaks of association and impacts beyond ourselves, it will raise questions for some of our people about whether they can remain part of us and the wider body within the Church of Scotland because they wonder if that breaking of trust means it's allowable or honoring to stay.

Which is why I felt it was important to raise it today because, let me say, in this past week I've been wrestling with that, I've been, I've felt that pain, I've faced those questions again, and as I've delved into the Scriptures, and I've become familiar with the struggle of some of our church fathers, I have found the courage and encouragement that would say that God would have us stay and seek the reformation of the Church of Scotland even if issues I've named today become reality.

Because, even in our story this morning, the breaking of trust with God does not have the last word, God was ready to lead and reshape His people for His purposes. At the beginning of chapter 7 where is God? where is he as Joshua makes that choice to send the spies, to send the thousands of troops but not the whole army? where is God? where is he? He's still there, He's patiently waiting, silently there waiting to be sought, waiting to be humbly submitted to. He was ready to lead His people and maybe if Joshua had sought Him first then there wouldn't be some of the consequences we read about. God was ready and waiting to lead and so when Joshua did seek the Lord He responded, He spoke to Joshua, maybe not what he wanted or expected but what he needed, and at first when I was reading this I was like 'Joshua, what are you doing man! - like dodgy territory, it sounds like you're gonna do what the previous generation did where they grumbled and then God punished them because they rebelled against Him!" but there's a difference with Joshua's prayer and its approach and then its appeal. In its approach it's with humility and lament over the situation and its appeal, it's not about what suits me, it's about honoring God and in that place of prayer with such an approach and such an appeal God responds and He leads, and He reshapes His people, for His purposes, and, I wonder whether, brothers and sisters, if we are in direct opposition to God's ways individually in our lives. Maybe we need to come into that place of prayer and humbly call out to the Lord to lead us in His ways, and reshape us and help us know what do I do differently here, to God how do I make this right, what is Your way, I just humbly seek reconciliation in that place of prayer, and on a national scale there is an opportunity this Saturday to join in prayer for anyone who wishes on Zoom with Covenant Fellowship Scotland and that's an organization made up of members and Ministers of the Church of Scotland who are working and praying for the reformation of the Church of Scotland according to orthodox and orthodox reading of the Bible and if you wish you can join in that time of prayer simply email or phone the Church Office for the login details.

Now, I'm conscious this will be hard this morning, because in any parish church there's any range of perspectives, and on many things, you won't agree with me. Does that mean you can't be welcome in this place? Of course, No! I have deep friendships people I love who are directly opposed to where I stand and with them, we seek the common ground and we work together and we respect one another's conclusions. Today I've simply shared mine.

And there may be things that you see in the church, you see in people who are of different theology to you, where you feel that they are breaking trust with God, and, if that's the case, then speak it out, it too needs to be named and shared because none of us are perfect, none of us have all the answers, we only see and perceive in power.

As I say, today will have been hard. I'm sure raising emotions for us all no matter where we are on the theological spectrum, and if you want you can come and talk with me about anything that's been said. You may also wish to replay the sermon, because there's a lot here and you might have not heard it all and you might not have heard it properly and what I actually said.

I hope, I'm praying nonetheless though, that we might be a people who seek God's leading, that He might have, He might be that that King of our lives, in every area of our life, that we would keep trust with Him and so be led by Him and to all He'd have for us and His purposes through us.

I pray it may be so, Amen,