

Josh 7
Tim Anderson 8/11/20

I'm not sure how many of you have read or watched 'The Hobbit'.
Master story teller that he is,
the last chapter Tolkien wrote rings very true to life.
Bilbo, the Hobbit who is hero of the story,
has had a great triumph.
He's been part of a band of fearless adventurers,
they've plundered the lair of the dragon Smaug
and seen it killed.
They've been part of a great battle,
where the dwarves and elves and men
have defeated the armies of darkness:
the orcs and goblins and hobgoblins.
And at the end of the story,
Bilbo comes home to sleepy Hobbiton.
And what does he find?
They've got his house up for sale
and they selling off his precious knick nacks,
presuming that he'd died on his adventures.
It often happens that when you've had a great triumph,
that something mundane brings you crashing back to earth.
Do you find that?

Seems like it happened to Joshua.
He'd led the Israelites across the Jordan.
A great triumph.
The waters piled up kilometres upstream.
The people walked across on dry land.
He'd led the Israelites to a great victory over the walled city of Jericho.
The city had been completely destroyed.
The Canaanites were melting in fear before the Israelite army.
And his next challenge is more routine.
The city of Ai is far smaller and less well defended than Jericho.

His spies coming back after scoping it.
They tell him,
"You don't need to send the whole army.
Two or three thousand should be enough.
Don't wear out the whole army for a little job."
It's a piece of cake by comparison with Jericho.
So Joshua sends 3000 just to be safe.
And he sat back ready to hear the news of further triumphs.
Unfortunately, it was not to be.
News of the battle came back to the camp.
His army had fled the battlefield.
Thirty six of his soldiers had been killed.
Everyone was terrified.
The confidence that had been built up in the defeat of Jericho
had flowed away like water through your fingers.
Joshua was brought back to earth with a thud.
What went wrong?

Was it over confidence?
Was he foolish in not sending the whole army?
Perhaps it was because he didn't pray
and ask God how many men to send?
No. It was neither of those.
The problem was not psychological -
Joshua's over confidence.
The problem was not lack of piety on Joshua's part.
But the problem was theological.
Joshua didn't know about it.
But Israel had not been faithful.
They had not been obedient
to the commands God had given them for taking over Jericho.
So what was the problem?

Here are the instructions from the chapter before:
Josh 6:18-19 "Keep away from the devoted things,

so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them.

Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it.

All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to Yahweh and must go into his treasury."

Those were pretty clear instructions.

Why did Yahweh give such instructions?

I mean he made the whole earth.

Every atom of gold and silver was created by him.

The skill of the miners who dug the metals up and purified them was also given by the Lord.

So why is he so insistent

that a bit of treasure from Jericho gets given to his treasury?

Well it's not because Yahweh wants it or needs it for himself.

He could make more any time he wanted to.

The point is that Israel is recognising what is happening.

The victory over Jericho is not their victory.

It's the Lord's victory.

So they put the spoils into his treasury as instructed.

That's how they demonstrate that they know it is his victory.

And 99% of them did exactly as they were told.

But one guy decided

that he would keep some of the spoils that were devoted to the Lord for himself.

Not a very smart move.

I mean Joshua's words were not hard to understand, were they?

"Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it."

Well that's hard to misunderstand.

Well poor old Joshua,

he had no idea about what Achan had done.

He blithely presuming that everyone had followed instructions.

The first inclining he had that something was not right,
was when the reports came of the battle not going well.

And what was Joshua's response?

7:6 "Then Joshua tore his clothes
and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of Yahweh,
remaining there until evening."

Joshua responded in the right way.

He didn't try to adjust his battle strategy.

He didn't say, "OK folks,

we went in with 3000 troops and that wasn't enough,
so now we'll take the whole army."

Numbers doesn't matter.

Yahweh can win the battle just as easily with 5 soldiers as 5 million.

The problem is not the number.

The problem is that something has gone wrong
in Israel's relationship with her God.

So Joshua turns to God.

The ark is the physical symbol of God's presence with his people.

Joshua goes to the ark.

He prostrates himself before Yahweh.

And he stays that way for hours.

He's not expecting that the solution to his problem
is going to come after 5 minutes.

He takes the elders of the people with him.

This is not just Joshua's problem.

This is a problem for the nation.

Joshua takes it very seriously.

And then he pours out his heart to his Lord.

His words might sound disrespectful.

7:7 "Alas, Sovereign Yahweh,

why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan
to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?

If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!"

It's like, "Hey Lord, I trusted you.

I put my neck on the line
 leading this people in the direction you indicated.
 And now it's all going pear shaped."
 It's like he's blaming God for the situation.
 But there's two things to say about that.
 The first is that he's talking to God not about God.
 God has very broad shoulders.
 He can cope with you telling him what you are thinking.
 Did you know that God already knows what you are thinking?
 So telling him is not giving him any nasty surprises.
 He already knows.
 The psalmist is often very forthright
 in letting God know when he's feeling hard done by.
 God will cope with your honesty.
 But he wants you talk to him.
 The second thing to say is that Joshua is not wrong.
 The reason they were routed by the men of Ai
 is because Yahweh abandoned them.
 Joshua is not aware of why Yahweh abandoned them.
 He's about to find out.
 But to this point he has no idea why.
 He's feeling abandoned because he has been abandoned.

So how does he try to persuade Yahweh not to abandon his people?
 7:8-9 "Pardon your servant, Lord.
 What can I say now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?
 The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this
 and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth.
 What then will you do for your own great name?"
 The last sentence is the key.
 What then will you do for your own great name?
 This is a prayer with a serious track record.
 Listen to Moses' prayer in Deut 9,
 "I lay prostrate before Yahweh those forty days and forty nights
 because Yahweh had said he would destroy you.

I prayed to Yahweh and said,
 "Sovereign Yahweh, do not destroy your people,
 your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power
 and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.
 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
 Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin.
 Otherwise the country from which you brought us will say,
 'Because Yahweh was not able
 to take them from the land he had promised them,
 and because he hated them,
 he brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.'
 But they are your people,
 your inheritance,
 that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm."

They are similar prayers, aren't they?
 Israel's leader appeals to the glory of the Lord's name.
 If his people go down in flames,
 then God's own name will be tarnished.

There's no "We're not really that bad" prayers.
 No minimising Israel's offense.
 There's no "We'll try really hard not to do it again".
 But if you allow your people to be wiped out,
 then people will speak against you.
 Your glory, Lord, is what matters.

We can pray those prayers for the church.
 "Lord, for a couple of generations,
 we've treated your church like a social club.
 We haven't made an real effort to reach the lost.
 But please revive us.
 Not because we are worth reviving,
 but because if you revive us
 then people will come to give you the glory you deserve."

That would be a good prayer.

Well Yahweh answers Joshua's prayer.

But it's not as simple as God just changing his opinion on Israel.

The source of the offence needs to be removed.

And so there's a fairly involved process whereby the sinner is revealed.

The tribes are called forward and the guilty tribe is named.

The clans of Judah come forward and the guilty clan is named.

The families of the Zerahites come forward

and the guilty family is named.

Then the guilty family is paraded one by one and Achan is named.

Why such an extended process?

You can imagine the fixated attention of the Israelites watching all this.

This is reality TV before the invention of TV.

God could have told Joshua straight up.

"Go to Achan's tent.

You'll find the stuff there.

Deal with him."

But Yahweh wants everyone to know.

This is going to be handled publically

and the reality TV style reveal makes it as public as possible.

Why does it need to be public?

Because everyone is involved.

Everyone has a stake in this.

What does it say in 7:1?

"Yahweh's anger burned against Israel."

What does Yahweh say in v11?

"Israel has sinned".

It's not Yahweh's anger burned against Achan.

It's not Achan has sinned.

The 36 men who died fighting against Ai,

they are sons, husbands, fathers.

There are people grieving them from every tribe.

This is something that affects the whole nation.

The whole nation is punished for Achan's sin.
 And the whole nation will witness the removal of the fault.
 And then the whole nation might learn to fear the Lord,
 and not disobey his commandments.
 Well maybe not.
 But they ought to.

Lots of readers of Joshua
 find the concept of corporate guilt difficult to handle.
 Why should the whole nation be treated as guilty
 when only one man has sinned?
 Indeed why should the whole of humanity be treated as guilty
 because of Adam's sin?
 As Paul says to the Romans,
 "The many died by the trespass of the one man."
 "The judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation."
 Australians struggle with the concept.
 Why should I be viewed as guilty of stealing indigenous land?
 That was done by other people long ago.
 But if you are part of a group,
 then you are implicated in the actions of the group.
 If you attend an Anglican Church,
 then you are implicated in the cover up of child abuse
 by the Anglican Church.
 That's not a very pleasant thought.
 If you are an Australian,
 then you are implicated in our treatment of the indigenous and refugees.
 You are implicated in our treatment of the unborn.
 Maybe we would have more of a sense of outrage
 about the wrongs of our church or the wrongs of our nation
 if we realised that we would personally be held accountable for them.

It's such bad news.
 But there is good news.
 "For if the many died by the trespass of the one man,

how much more did God's grace
and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ,
overflow to the many."

If sin is infectious,

God's grace is also infectious.

If Israel can share in Achan's sin,

they can also share in Joshua's cleansing of that sin.

If we share in Adam's sin,

we can also share in Jesus' cleansing of that sin.

We might not like the idea of being declare participants

in stuff we don't personally feel responsible for.

But we need to weigh that up against the blessing of forgiveness
that we were definitely not responsible for obtaining.

As I read this chapter,

one thing I reflect on are the devoted things.

Achan was told to put the silver and gold in Yahweh's treasury.

Not because Yahweh needs silver and gold.

But because Israel needed to acknowledge

that victory belonged to the Lord.

So what are the devoted things for us as Christians?

We're not going to be fighting holy war on the Lord's behalf.

He's not going to expect us to render the spoils of war.

But there may be other things that the Lord requires of his followers.

Things that he expects us to render to him as devoted things.

What is expected of the Christian?

It leads me to Rom 12:1.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters,

in view of God's mercy,

to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,

holy and pleasing to God -

this is your true and proper worship."

Well we are told as Christians what God wants us to offer.

He wants our bodies.

It would actually be easier to give the silver and gold.

But he wants our bodies.

What does he mean by this?

Well to get the full picture,

you would want to read the whole of Romans 12.

We're not preaching Romans 12 today.

But it's enough to say that God wants our whole selves.

He wants all of us.

He wants us to live for him full time, 24/7.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

That's what he wants from us.

"Undivided, I want to live for you.

Single minded, all that I say, all that I do."

That's what God wants.

The demand placed upon us is just so much higher
that what the Israelites had.

They just needed to hand over the devoted things.

We are the devoted things.

We need to hand over ourselves.

At the end of this service you will pray.

"Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice ..."

Take note of what you are praying.

You are promising to hand over the devoted things.

Don't be like Achan and hold them back.

But if the demand on us is higher,

remember also that we have someone better than Joshua
pleading on our behalf.

Achan and all his family were stoned to cleanse the nation of his sin.

Jesus was crucified to cleanse God's people of our own sin.

1 John 2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world."