

THE TRAGEDY OF ACHAN

So we've spent the last 6 weeks talking about growing up in our faith. See, we all start out as infants in Christ – in fact, when we accept Jesus as our Savior and when we are baptized – the Bible describes us as being born-again. We all start out as spiritual infants. But we're not supposed to remain infants. We're supposed to grow up and mature in the faith. And throughout this series – that's exactly what we've been talking about – growing up in our faith. Tonight we're going to wrap up this series. I usually like to end these series' on a positive note – but tonight we are going to wind up this series tonight on something less than a positive note – we're going to finish this series by looking at the story of a man who had learned all the lessons we've talked about so far – this is a man who should very mature in his faith – he was there when God led His people out of Egypt – he was there when God performed all those miracles during that 40 years in the wilderness – he was there when God led them into the Promised Land. This is a man who should be at the height of spiritual maturity – but as we will see tonight, he is not. The man we are going to meet tonight is named Achan. Achan was one of God's chosen people – he was an Israelite. And as I said, he had seen all the power and the miracles of God firsthand - he had seen God's power in Egypt – he had seen God's power in the wilderness – he had seen God's power in the Promised Land. And now, he's in the Promised Land. He's living the promise. But Achan throws all of that away – in one foolish moment – in one selfish act – Achan surrenders all of his spiritual maturity – and then he loses his life. And the last thing we read about Achan is this – **Joshua 7:26 – Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day.** Here's why I think it's so important to share this story with you on the last night of this series; because you some things in common with Achan. Achan had been a

slave to Egypt – you had been a slave to sin. God rescued Achan out of his slavery. God rescued you out of your slavery. Achan spent 40 years wandering around in the wilderness. You’ve spent a great deal of time wandering around in the wilderness. Achan saw God’s power firsthand. You have seen God’s power firsthand. God led Achan into the Promised Land. God is leading you into the Promised Land. So you have a lot in common with Achan. And the reason I want you to know his story – is so that you can avoid the ending to his story. Achan passes from history and leaves only a pile of rocks. I’d like to help you write a different ending to your story. The story of Achan is the story of a man who never really grew up in the faith. And that is the theme of this whole series. And God tells us the story of Achan to show us the consequences of not growing up in the faith. Not only did Achan suffer from his immaturity – his whole family suffered – and then the whole nation of Israel suffered because of it. And the same thing still happens today – when you fail to reach spiritual maturity – you are likely to do something just like Achan did – and if you do, not only will you suffer – but your family is likely to suffer for it - and if your church is likely to suffer for it. The story of Achan begins before we actually meet the man. Let me set the scene for you: The Israelites have entered the Promised Land – and the first thing they had to do was take the city of Jericho. Well, they do that – Jericho has been defeated – but now God warns them not to take anything from that city for themselves. All the treasures of that city are there for the taking. God says, “Don’t touch any of it.” **Joshua 6:18-19 – But 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 articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.”** So they have these specific

instructions – that everything in that city belongs to God – those things are devoted to God – devoted things – God says, “Do not touch them.” **7:1 – But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan...took some of them.** So Achan has done the one thing God told them not to do. And when Achan is confronted – he confesses - **7:21 – “When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and wedge of gold, I coveted them and took them.** So Achan directly disobeys God. But we will see is – it’s not just Achan that suffers. Because of Achan’s disobedience – scripture says - **the Lord’s anger burned against Israel.** Not just against Achan – the Lord’s anger burned against Israel. Big lesson for us here, my friends. Your spiritual immaturity will always affect more than just you. But why did Achan do this in the first place? I don’t know – why do you do all the selfish, sinful things that you do? It goes back to the beginning, doesn’t it? It goes back to the enemy showing us that tempting fruit and convincing us that we could get away with eating it. That was the first victory the enemy scored against us – but it sure wouldn’t be the last. And you may remember, Eve tried to resist – Eve said, “If I eat of that fruit, God said that I will die.” And the devil said, “You surely will not die.” And let me just paraphrase that for you – the devil said, “Go ahead and sin – it won’t kill you – in fact, you can get away with it!” My friends, that remains the greatest lie the devil ever told. And for some strange reason, we still believe it. Adam and Eve fell for that lie – and they disobeyed a direct command from God. Well, that’s the same thing Achan has done. He knew exactly what God had said – but he believed the lie that he could somehow disobey God and get away with it. This is exactly the point where so many of us fail. We know what the Bible says – we know what God commands of us – but somehow, we think that we can disobey God and get away with it. **Do not be deceived: God cannot be**

mocked. A man reaps what he sows. This is why our study of Achan is so important as we come to the end of this series of growing up in the faith. I think every one of us here desires even greater Christian maturity than we have now – hopefully every one of us here knows that whatever Christian maturity we have now – we still have a lot more to gain – we all still have a lot of growing up to do in the faith. And the story of Achan is so important because it is a painful reminder of what can happen when we don't grow up in the faith. The story of Achan is not a pleasant story to read – and the shadow of Achan falls on all the pages and all the people of the Bible – his shadow falls on us today. And part of what makes this story so hard is that the Israelites had just experienced a great victory. They made it into the Promised Land after 40 years in the wilderness – they have this great victory at Jericho – they're feeling really good – they are feeling strong – feeling confident. And they immediately begin making their plans for the next battle they will have to fight. But as they go into their next battle – rather than winning another victory – they were badly defeated – **7:5 – They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water.** And just like that, all their confidence was gone – all their courage – all their hope gone. Joshua was the leader of the people - **V 6 – Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there until evening. The elders of Israel did the same.** All the people have lost heart – and the leaders are just broken before God. But for the leaders, it's more than just this defeat at the hands of the enemy – for them it's this terrible confusion – they don't know why it happened. God had promised them victory – and they had done everything God asked them to do – so the leaders don't know why this happened. But there is one man who does know. Achan knows

why it happened – and now all he can do is wait to see if he is found out. Well, at first Joshua blames God for their defeat– **V 7 – Joshua said, “Ah, Sovereign Lord, 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!”** They are defeated. They are confused. And now, they’re questioning God. Then Joshua starts imagining what will happen when the neighboring nations hear about this defeat – how other nations are going to think that the Israelites are weak – and other nations will attack them. And in a panic Joshua even says – **V 9 – “What then will you do for your own great name?”** Don’t you love that question – “Hey God, it looks like you’re in real trouble here. What are you going to do to get yourself out of this predicament?” Well, now it’s time for God to speak up – **V 10 – The Lord said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant...they have taken some of the devoted things... and put them with their own possessions.”** Only Achan had acted against God – but notice again that Israel is being held accountable. Because of one man, Israel loses the battle – because of one man, many other men have died in that battle – and all of those men have left widows and orphans – because of one man, the nation has lost its courage and confidence. This is going to have to be dealt with. The rest of this story is all about the unavoidable consequences of sin. God tells Israel that something was taken in battle – and the thing that was taken is in one of their tents. **V 13 –You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.”** And God then has all the 12 tribes of Israel stand before Him – and He chooses one of the tribes. Then from that one tribe – He has each family stand before Him - and God chooses one family. And from that one family – each man must come forward – and God chooses one man. Guess who

the last man standing is? Achan. Can you imagine how terrified he must have been as the group around him gets smaller and smaller – and then only he is left standing before God and before his people. **V 19 – Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”** The stolen items are then discovered in Achan’s tent – and they are laid out in front of Achan – right there for all to see. Remember what they were? A robe from Babylon, some silver and a piece of gold. A man had traded his life for these things – he had given away his honor for these things – and for these things the whole nation had suffered. And the story doesn’t get any better – Achan is put to death - and everything that was identified with Achan – everything he had is burned and placed under a pile of rocks – which takes us right back to where we started - **V 26 – Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day.** This whole series has been about growing up in the faith – moving ahead to Christian maturity. So this is the final, and very difficult lesson for us in this series – as you move ahead in your faith – as you get closer and closer to God – the enemy is going to try to get closer to you – and the enemy will try everything he can to get you to disobey God. But now you know it’s coming. Now you can be ready when the devil starts whispering to you. And when the devil starts whispering your name – you just remember the name of Achan – you remember his story – so you don’t ever make it your story.