

that God will sort out what we cannot, especially those sins that remains endemic even amongst God's people.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Ask the Lord to help you address any endemic sin that lies within your life, and prayerfully accept that Jesus' own life was given in payment for that sin. This is your route to redemption and liberty from the consequences of sin.
- Pray for those who know they have sinned and do not know how to deal with this or have confidence in Christ who can save from sin. Pray that the real Gospel may be explained to them, so that they may know God's forgiveness.

Final Prayer

Almighty God, Your grace is sufficient for us in every situation. When we feel oppressed by the circumstances in which we find ourselves, remind us that in You, we have a hope that reaches far beyond our present problems; and in Your mercy, grant us peace. Thank You, Almighty God; AMEN

Prayer

What can I offer You today, Lord God? My work, my words, my deeds? Yes these, but so much more; I offer You today my thoughts, my feelings and my intentions, and also my life, my mind, my heart and my soul; I give You everything, so that I may be Your true servant both now and in the future. Use me, I pray in Your eternal plans, and may all I do be worthy of the great call You have placed upon my life. Receive my offering, Lord God; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Banking

At the end of this week, pray that through a renewed sense of justice and responsibility, governments and bankers will work together to overcome our world recession.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for friendship, and pray for all the friends you have
- Pray for childcare services, and the social pressures they face
- Pray for Pakistan as it tries to deal with terrorism within

Meditation

I looked, as the people sang their worship to the Lord,
And they gave of themselves as the Spirit led:
Some sang with full voice to praise His name,
Wrapped up in the spiritual power of the songs;
Some moved their bodies in time with the music,
And lifted their hands to honour His glory;
Some sang with feeling, through the power of the words,
Receiving the eternal truths of the Faith;
Some sat and worshipped despite evident suffering,
Soaked in the healing balm of their worship;
Some worshipped in tongues, in a spirit of praise,
Submitting their souls as an offering to God.
Only the Lord knows the truth of a soul in worship,
And if what we see is genuinely from the heart:
We see worship as offered and presume the best;
We must, to give our Lord a true offering of love.

Bible Study - Joshua 7:16-26

¹⁶ So early the next morning, Joshua had Israel brought forward by tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. ¹⁷ He then had the clans of Judah brought forward, and the clan of Zerah was taken; and he had the clan of Zerah brought forward, man by man, and Zabdi was taken. ¹⁸ And he had his household brought forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. ¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and confess to him. Now, tell me what you

have done; do not hide it from me.’²⁰ Achan replied to Joshua, ‘It is true; I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel. This is what I did: ²¹ among the spoils I saw a beautiful cloak from the land of Babylon, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took them. They are now hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.’

²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. ²³ They took the items out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out before the LORD. ²⁴ Then Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan son of Zerah, with the silver, the mantle, and the bar of gold, with his sons and daughters, with his oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent and all that he had; and they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵ Joshua said, ‘Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today.’ Then all Israel stoned him to death; they burned them with fire and piled stones on them, ²⁶ raising a great heap of stones over him that remains to this day; and the LORD turned from His fierce anger. This is why that place is called the Valley of Achor (trouble) to this day.

Review

This story contains important truths, but it describes the seriousness of sin and its tragic consequences. It is very hard for us to read this story today and not feel deeply challenged by the awfulness of what happened to Achan and his family. Some will respond by saying that if God could not accept the repentance of one like Achan, then the whole concept of discipleship must be unsustainable. This story is also used by some as an example of the ‘wrathful’ character of God revealed in the Old Testament; and they abandon the idea that the ‘God’ of the Old Testament is the same as the ‘loving God’ found in the New.

Difficult stories in Scripture We must face these issues, but firstly, we must recall that this incident has strong parallels with the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament (Acts 5:1f.), where a couple dies having acted with duplicity by hiding what they declared as given to the Lord. Ananias and Sapphira died because they thought it acceptable to lie and keep for themselves what they had said they had given to God. Achan and his family (and therefore his descendants) died because Achan thought it acceptable to do the same. There are also differences between each story, but we cannot ignore the similarities, and the consequent challenge to accept that we cannot treat God like anyone else. We have a choice, as we always do with God’s Word, either to accept that scripture records these stories for good reason and find out what this is, or allow our understandable feelings of horror to rule our hearts to the point of turning away from God’s Word.

Lessons from what happened to Achan The story of Achan is clear enough, but these points help us grasp the spiritual significance of the story. Achan’s sin is described using Hebrew words that copy the sin of Eve and Adam in Genesis 3; Achan confessed that he ‘saw’ something ‘beautiful’ (the same words as ‘saw’ and ‘good’ – as in ‘good to eat’ in Genesis 3:6), and he attempted to hide from the Lord what he had done (7:21, see Gen 3:8). The description of what Achan took is remarkably similar to lists of traded goods found in other ancient civilisations, and represents the inclusion of worldly values into God’s community. Achan’s sin was to covet (7:21) worldly things above God’s commands, for the Lord required that all these things be given to Him for destruction (6:21 etc.). Achan’s specific hidden sin had compromised all Israel, and Joshua’s attempts to seek general

forgiveness (7:6-9) failed to recognise the need for individuals to account for themselves before God. In addition, the inclusion of Achan’s family in the punishment was necessary so that the sin was not passed on or remembered by his descendants. Lastly, punishment by stoning meant that all Israel resolved the sin by which they were afflicted. Any thoughts we may have about the feelings of those involved are mere presumption; we neither know what they felt, nor know how God dealt with Achan and his family after they paid the price for their sins.

Extreme messages What can we learn from this? Firstly, we must accept that this story is just one of many stories about God and His people, but it is an extreme story with an extreme message. Just as God saves those who accept Him and do what He says (as with the story of Rahab), those who sin reap the consequence of rejecting God Himself (as in the story of Achan); by their deeds, a pagan prostitute is saved, and an Israelite with an impeccable pedigree (hence the genealogy, v18) is condemned. However, there is a whole world of what we might call ‘normal life’ existing between these extremes, and much of the Old and the New Testament describes how God deals His people amidst the usual complexities of this life. However, in stories like this and that of Ananias and Sapphira, we are reminded of the absolute truth, that acceptance of God and obedience to Him means life, and rejection and sin means death. For most people the final judgement is delayed, but here, God reminds us graphically of ultimate truth, and the consequences of what we do now.

Salvation now Here in the book of Joshua, the awful story of Achan shows that God’s people cannot manipulate Him, do what they want rather than what He wants, or avoid the consequences of choosing sin when they know it is wrong. None of us can escape this truth. However, I cannot conclude without saying simply that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is precisely this. When we sin, we incur a penalty of death just as Achan did. Yes, it is that serious; whatever it is. Nevertheless, when we confess our sins, Christ accepts the penalty of death we deserve (like Achan) for our sin. His death accounts for our sin if we will accept it; for by faith we are set from the curse of death, and all this makes so much more sense after reading Achan’s story from the Old Testament!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what you feel about this Scripture, and discuss whether it is easy to find any ‘message’ within such a story.
2. What do we mean by ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23), and how does the story of Achan connect with the New Testament?
3. In what way is the story of Ananias and Sapphira any different to this story (Acts 5:1-11)

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I will not pretend that I find it easy to write this study. As I have written, I have grappled with some difficult personal news about a situation in which senior Christian leaders have acted disgracefully towards others within the church. Whilst I can understand that some will find the story of Achan difficult, it reminds me that God is completely just and sin is unacceptable to Him. Because of that, I feel confident that the appalling behaviour I have witnessed will be accounted for one day. I do not understand it, and I know I will have to account for my own actions according to God’s Word, but it is a great relief to me to know