

IT Matters. But just what is **IT**? And why does it matter? **IT** includes those qualities/characteristics essential to living life. **IT** influences how you think and act; and how your life will impact the world around you. It's the **IT Factor**.

Throughout this series, we're going to look into the lives of a number of OT characters to discover **IT**. What was **IT** that these men/women had or didn't have that made a difference? Last week, we looked at Joseph to discover that **IT Matters** we have spiritual fortitude and never allow our circumstances to determine our intimacy/trust in God. **IT Matters** we don't allow negative experiences in life to hold us back from experiencing God's blessings/will. **IT Matters** we understand God uses trials and tribulation to prepare us for greater things for His glory and good.

Today, we're going to look at a more obscure OT character who is going to teach us about **IT** from his great mistake. How many of you have ever heard of Achan? He was the man who was ach'in for a break'in?

The Story of Achan is a sad story of what happens when we allow the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life to determine our steps. It also reminds us of how our actions, or inactions, can affect the lives of others.

From the outset, let me say that discussing the topic of sin is never easy or popular. And even though the words may seem to come easy, b/c there's so much to say on the subject, it's never pleasant. Yet the simple reality is that all sin, no matter how seemingly innocent it may appear, grieves the heart of God as it damages people and relationships and inflicts both spiritual and earthly consequences – for the wages of sin brings death – and a person always reaps what they sow.

But there's a difference b/w failing and walking in darkness. We're all going to make mistakes and slip up. But to walk in darkness is to live habitually in sin w/out regard for God.

Let me be clear. If you're a follower of Jesus, having accepted Christ as your Savior by grace thru faith – and your life has been transformed by the deposit of the H.S. in you – it doesn't make you sinless, but you should sin less. Why? B/c w/ the H.S. in you, God has begun to work anew in your life to transform you into His image – so you can be confident that *He who began a good work in you will carry it onto completion until the day of Christ Jesus*. Ph. 1:6

Charles Swindoll writes – *Once we have been brought into the family of God by grace, we must continue to live in grace. At the same time, however, we have no excuse for playing w/ sin. It's no less damaging to the saved as it is to the lost, and it speaks volumes about the quality of our relationship w/ God. (This is the point of **1 John 1:5-10**)*

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship w/ him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship w/ one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be w/out sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:5-10

In this text, John strips away any excuse we might have for ignoring or justifying sin. It makes no place for sin to thrive or for us to think there are no consequences to our actions. Either sin is carrying an unbelieving person off to hell or it is leading a believing person in carnality/rebellion. The first separates the unbeliever from eternity w/ God while the second separates a believer from intimacy/fellowship. Thankfully there's a solution to all sin – confession unto repentance provided through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross – it is only by his stripes that a sinner can be healed.

So whether you're an unbeliever living in your lostness, or a believer living as one who is lost – God's grace is the single solution to the problem of you sin and **1 John 1:9** is the method of repentance.

Here is the point. Your righteousness matters. It matters you don't harbor hidden sin. It matters you live an abiding life in alignment w/ the heart and will of God. It matters that should you stumble, you repent and return to God. **IT Matters.**

I The STORYLINE of Achan

The story of Achan is a great reminder that we should never underestimate the amount of damage one person can do when they choose to live outside of the will of God.

To fully appreciate the story of Achan, one needs a little context of what was transpiring in the nation of Israel.

In **Joshua 6**, we find the story of one of the most important stories of the OT – the battle of Jericho. While many of us might read right past it, the truth is this event was an incredibly vital victory for the next generation of Israelites. After 40 yrs. in the wilderness and hearing about the Exodus from their parents/grandparents, this new generation needed some encouragement and they needed to see the powerful, providing hand of God. And God didn't disappoint. Jericho was their “Red Sea” experience as God allowed them to participate in His miraculous victory. Let's not forget that the Hebrews had just crossed over the Jordan and were now in Canaan to begin their conquest of the land of Promise. **And Jericho was the linchpin of the entire conquest.**

One commentator suggested the battle of Jericho was like the invasion of Normandy during WWII. That victory for the Allies was the beginning of the end for the Nazis. It was the beachhead that changed the entire war – and everyone knew it – including Hitler. In the same manner, Jericho was the key to conquering all of Canaan. W/ the fortress of Jericho out of the way, the conquest of Canaan was just a matter of time. And that’s where we pick up the story.

The 7th time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are w/ her in her house shall be spared, b/c she hid the spies we sent. 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 the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.” When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the Lord... Joshua 6:16-21

BIG! God decreed everything in the victory was holy to Him and no one was to take a single item. But Achan couldn’t resist and his decision had a major ripple effect. *Let’s read...*

*So the Lord was w/ Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land. **BUT** the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan, son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel. 1*

BUT. Israel has just experienced a great victory, but now things are about to change b/c of the sin of man.

Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned, they said, "Not all the army will have to go up against Ai. Send 2,000 or 3,000 men to take it and do not weary the whole army, for only a few people live there." 2-3

Note the spies' report. "Joshua – this is a slam dunk. Ai is a spot in the road – it's going to be a two-hit fight. We'll hit them and they'll hit the ground." We can send in the JV – just a few soldiers. Think about it – Ai means *ruins* – just how impressive could the place have been. So Joshua took their advice sending in 3,000 troops – **and they get waxed!**

So about 3,000 went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about (36) of them. 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 in fear and became like water. 4-5

WHAT? It can't be! How can Ai defeat the armies of the living God? Something's awry! B/c of one man's selfishness and greed, 36 families are fatherless and the nation is confused and disillusioned. And in all likelihood they were shot in the back while retreating. The loss was inexplicable. **This was the equivalent of a tee-ball team beating the Atlanta Braves – it just isn't plausible.**

While I know we're focusing on Achan, I just have to point out a very important point about leadership and Joshua...

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, 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! 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?" 6-9

Joshua reveals a couple of great qualities every leader should possess. His first reaction was grief for his fallen men, then for the nation's future, and ultimately for the name of the Lord. It wasn't about him, but about God and His will.

Leader Lesson – in the face of defeat (when you might've gotten ahead of God), put on the brakes, take a step back, and make the time to look up and seek the heart of God.

*The LORD said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? **Israel has sinned**; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them w/ their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run b/c they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.*

I just love God's response. Joshua, I appreciate your concern for Me and my will, but the problem is **sin in the camp**. And I'm not going to allow My people to experience victory if they're not willing to follow Me. So here is what you do...

“Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them. “‘In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the LORD chooses shall come forward clan by clan; the clan the LORD chooses shall come forward family by family; and the family the LORD chooses shall come forward man by man.

*Whoever is caught w/ the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along w/ all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done an outrageous thing in Israel!’’ Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen. **13-18***

So before we get to the punchline, let me speak to the possible mindset of Achan. On the surface, what he did wasn't unusually in ancient times. In fact, in most cases, a soldier often was compensated by the plunder they gathered after a victory. Normally, after a city was taken, a soldier was encouraged to grab the loot as payment of services – **but not this time**. God had already laid claim. So the problem was His direct defiance of God's command. He thought the rules didn't apply to him. And apparently, even up to the bitter end, he didn't think he was going to be discovered.

Isn't that just like us? Let's face it. For those harboring hidden sin – you think in some way, somehow, that no one will ever find out and that you're going to get away w/ it.

*Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.” Achan said, “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When **I saw** in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, **I coveted** them and **I took** them. They’re hidden in the ground inside my tent, w/ the silver underneath.” 19-21*

Don't miss the downward spiral of Achan's sin. He knew the command of God, but he determined His way was better.

I saw – I coveted – I took – I hid – and most detrimental of all – I didn't think I'd get caught.

B/c of his sin – Israel experienced their first and only military defeat in Canaan and 36 soldiers were killed.

We must never underestimate the amount of damage our sin can have when we choose to live outside of the will of God.

Question: How did Achan get himself in this position?

II The PUNCHLINE of Achan

A He LIVED without Accountability

If you notice in the text, God wasn't just upset w/ Achan – He also took issue w/ the entire nation of Israel... Why? B/c they turned a blind eye to Achan's action – they didn't give him the necessary accountability he needed to follow God.

He sinned b/c no one else cared if he sinned.

We all must have accountability if we're going to thrive in Christ – and that is one of the purposes of the church... that *we spur one another along towards love and good works.*

Just like the 3 Musketeers – *All for one and one for all.*

God's people today are called to be one body in Christ belonging one to another. We need each other to help us walk in fellowship w/ the Father. This requires we do more than attend the same church – we have to get engaged into each other's lives. **Accountability is essential!**

B He LOOKED a Second Time

It's not a sin to see something – that's life. And temptation itself isn't a sin – **but what we do w/ temptation and that first glance makes all the difference in the world.**

If David would've just glanced at Bathsheba and then turned away... but no! He had to take a 2nd peek and it was all over but the crying. So it always is when we tempt temptation.

My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them w/in your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil. Pr. 4:20-27

C He LIED to Himself about the Truth

Instead of seeing this plunder as the treasury of God – he convinced himself that it was the spoils of victory. He saw what belonged to God as something that belonged to him. But these weren't the spoils of victory – they were a treasure wholly dedicated to God. It didn't belong to Achan, or Israel, but to God alone.

When God identifies something as special belonging to Him – we have no right to change or defy it – but only to honor it.

I'm reminded of the tithe. I've seen a number of believers do everything to avoid tithing. They'll claim grace, or NT, or another crazy scheme – and some just don't care; yet the Bible is clear the tithe belongs to God. They're lying to take from God what belongs to Him.

D He LONGED to Satisfy His Wants

Achan was covetous. He wanted what he wanted. Maybe he felt it was owed him. Maybe he wanted a better life after a number of years in the wilderness sleeping on rocks. Maybe he wanted to be like the Jones's next door. What we do know is he coveted what didn't belong to him; and the temptation to take it was more than he could bear.

So instead of singing praises in his heart to God for the great victory God had given – Achan was imagining what it'd be like to have all those treasures.

Listen to **James 1:14** – *but each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and is enticed.*

The imagination is the “womb” in which desire is conceived and from which sin gives birth and ushers in death.

E He LOWERED His Expectations of God

His worst mistake was thinking God wouldn't notice or care about him or his sin. I think Achan thought no one would notice and God would turn a blind-eye to it.

He wasn't the first. Adam and Eve tried to cover their sin as they hid in the bushes. It reminds me of the words in Numbers 32:23: *Be sure you sins will find you out...*

What's sad is that in his disobedience, Achan didn't stop to think that even w/ all this wealth – he was never going to be able to enjoy it unless he abandoned the people of Israel otherwise someone would've noticed what he had stolen.

It reminds me of the story of the pastor playing golf on a Sunday AM instead of going to church to preach. The angels are all over Jesus about not disciplining this pastor for playing hooky. On the 1st hole, the pastor hit a hole-n-one. As he was hoot'in and holler'in, the angels are just giving it to Jesus. Then, on the very next hole, the pastor hits another hole-n-one but on a par 4 – for a double eagle. The angels are beside themselves and say to Jesus – he is never going to go back to preaching on Sunday. But Jesus looks at the angels and says, “Relax guys... who's he going to tell?”

IT MATTERS! Our understanding of God matters. Our pursuit of God's holiness matters. Our hatred for sin matters. Our accountability w/ other believers and engagement in the ministry of the local church – matters. It matters.

So how does the story of Achan end? Sadly and abruptly. **Instead of repenting when he had the chance, he held out until he was caught** – and the result was his utter demise as God allowed the man known as trouble to be overwhelmed and destroyed by his troubles.

Sin – It Matters. More importantly, what you do in those instances where you stumble – matters. You can't hide it in a closet or in a hole in your backyard – it has to be confronted and dealt w/ or else it'll lead to your own demise.

Sin is serious and God takes it seriously. So seriously He sent His only son to die for sin and to set us free into a relationship w/ Him.

Don't wait until you're caught to confess, do it when you're convicted – and be set free into Christ. There is but one simple solution to the problem of sin – and his name is Jesus.

ADMIT it – Confession

STOP it – Repentance

FORGET it – Move on

He paid a debt he did not owe – and we all have a debt we cannot pay...