

DEVOTIONAL

SHIPWRECKED
SELFISHNESS: ACHAN AND ISRAEL
SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: What is selfishness? Why is selfishness destructive to relationships?

Key Text: *“But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.”* (Joshua 7:2)

There is a fable about a king who commanded six of his subjects to each bring him a bucket of fresh milk and pour it into one big bucket. Each of his subjects selfishly thought to himself, “I’ll bring a bucket of water, and nobody will know the difference!” When the king dipped out his milk, it was all water! All six subjects ended up in prison for disobeying their king.

Selfishness—placing your own interests above the interests of others—is one of the greatest destroyers of relationships. It often roots in *greed*—the attitude of wanting something no matter what it takes to get it, and *pride*—an overly high opinion of oneself. Galatians 5:20 calls selfishness a “*work of the flesh*” (“flesh” is “self” spelled backward minus the “h”!), James 3:16 says selfishness leads to disorder and evil practices, and James 3:13-14 says selfishness is the result of human “wisdom” that leaves God out.

Discuss: Read Philippians 2:3-4. What key words and phrases regarding selfishness do you notice in this passage?

Discuss: Read Romans 12:3. What role does humility play in combatting selfishness?

Discuss: Read Psalm 119:36. What role does God’s Word play in resisting selfishness?

Today’s lesson revolves around the selfish actions of a man in the Old Testament named Achan and how his self-seeking sin shipwrecked the progress of the nation of Israel as they moved forward in claiming Canaan, the land God had promised them. Be sure to take a few minutes to read about Achan and this event in its entirety in Joshua 7:1-26.

Achan was a soldier in Israel’s army under Joshua’s command. After the fall of Jericho, Achan disobeyed God’s direct command (Josh.6:18) by plundering for himself gold, silver, and an expensive garment from Jericho and hiding the items under his tent. The gold and silver Achan took were intended for the tabernacle; they were God’s possession. So, Achan not only disobeyed a direct order, but he stole from God Himself and then tried to cover it up.

Joshua discovered that the defeat the Israeli army suffered at the city of Ai after the victory at Jericho was the result of God’s displeasure over Achan’s sin (Josh.7:1-19). Joshua commanded that Achan be stoned to death, then he and all that belonged to him were consumed by fire, and a heap of stones was raised over the ashes (Josh.7:20-26).

Discuss: 1 Chronicles 2:7 calls Achan, “*the troubler of Israel.*” In what ways can one person’s sin have a harmful ripple effect, extending out to bring trouble to others?

Let's learn 4 truths from Achan's sin:

1. Sin often begins with seeing, continues by coveting, and culminates in taking.

Read Joshua 7:21 and notice the verbs Achan used to describe his steps that led to his sin: "*I...saw...coveted...took.*" These are the same steps Eve took when she listened to Satan (Gen.3:5-6), and David took when he sinned with Bathsheba (2 Sam.11:1-4).

Discuss: Achan, Eve, and David's first step downward into sin began with seeing. What practical instructions does Proverbs 4:25-27 give us regarding our eyes?

Discuss: Achan, Eve, and David's second step downward into sin was coveting, which is having an all-consuming desire or lust for something. What does James 1:14 say about coveting?

Discuss: Achan, Eve, and David's third step downward into sin involved selfishly taking. According to Philippians 4:11-13, what is Paul's "secret" to satisfaction?

Discuss: Of the three downward steps into sin—*seeing, coveting, taking*—which do you find the most difficult to resist? Why?

2. Sin makes promises that it cannot deliver.

Achan thought he would be rich by stealing the gold, silver, and garment, but it all ended up doing him no good—he couldn't spend the gold or silver, and he couldn't wear the garment. What appeared to him to be of great worth was actually worthless.

Discuss: How would you advise a new Christian to find satisfaction and joy in the Lord and in His commands, and not in things of the unbelieving world?

3. God always takes sin seriously.

God commanded that Achan and his family be destroyed. It is likely that Achan's family was complicit in his crime (perhaps by helping him hide the items in the tent, etc.) (Josh.7:24-25). The heap of stones raised at that location (Josh.7:26) was a tangible, unforgettable reminder to the rest of the nation to obey God.

4. When we turn to the Lord, no defeat is permanent.

Once Joshua and Israel had dealt with selfish Achan and his sin, God gave Israel victory over Ai, and they were able to move forward into Canaan (Josh.8:1-29).

Discuss: What do we learn about God from Psalm 86:15 and 1 John 1:9?

For Further Study:

Free online commentary on the Book of Joshua at www.enduringword.com

"Why Was God's Punishment of Achan So Harsh?" article at www.crosswalk.com

"Who Was Achan?" article at www.gotquestions.org