

Proposition: sin's consequences can hurt your whole family but a life in God's hands will be transformed from a place of pain to a ministry of hope.

I am going to speak about a topic this morning that churches are talking about less and less. In this madly politically correct world where we want to make sure we don't offend anyone or leave anyone out, even if they are not present in the room, today's topic is getting less and less popular.

You and I are living in a world where people outside the church, and often inside the church, believe what determines what is right or wrong for a person should be set by their environment. Morality should be a reflection of the community's common consensus. They say that what is right and wrong for you may not be necessarily right or wrong for me, just follow your heart.

People are OK with the concept of God, if that God submits to their ideology. And that is that God should be good and loving and inclusive of whatever image you have of him.

God has a whole different perspective. He sets the standard and it doesn't change irrespective of the cultural mind-set of a country. Is God good? Yes. Is He loving? Amazingly so. But the big issue that this generation has with God is that God is Holy and He judges sin.

Sin, what is that? Maybe we shouldn't talk about negative things or controversial things?

In March next year a world class evangelist Canon J. John will be holding a crusade in Whangarei on Easter Saturday. He says that if you want to know what sin is, look at how it is spelt and notice the letter in the middle. 'i'. Sin is about living a life in a way which is 'i' focused and not God and other focused.

The next few weeks we are looking at Jesus the Prince of Peace; why don't we just skip this shocking story in Joshua 7 and go straight to that series. It's a lot nicer to talk about the Prince of Peace than it is to talk about sin and repentance.

And I agree with you, except, our God is a holy God, He made us and He knows what is good for us and God is repulsed by sin; He sees it as a contaminant that only He can clean and if left unchecked, something that will harm whole families and communities.

When I talk to non churched people about sin, I wouldn't use the word sin. People understand the words contaminated, or toxic, or polluted a whole lot better.

But we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, we are saved, we are going to heaven. Why should we read a passage from a time in history where God was showing the Israelites that He is holy and cannot co-exist with sin?

If you are a Christian, you are saved. You have a relationship with God and you are going to heaven. No one can pluck you out of God's hands. You are in a place of security. If you do something dumb, God will restore you quickly but ... that doesn't mean we take sin lightly, sin left unchecked will impact your closeness to the Lord, sin left unchecked in a Christian will still have consequences that hurt other people. God will never take away our freedom of choice and so if you get comfortable with sin you can end up on a very dangerous slippery slope.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:1 that a Christian can lose their saltiness and become no different to a non-believer.

Paul writing to his mentee Timothy often speaks about how a person's conscience can become seared or hardened to God and that their spiritual lives can become a shipwreck (eg 1 Tim 4:2; 1 Tim 1:19).

Paul says that it is possible to sin against the Holy Spirit who primarily points us to Jesus; that is to say that a believer can become so comfortable with sin, so hardened in their conscience that they might even reject salvation in Jesus.

There is a list that is repeated 3x in the NT.

1 Cor 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Rev 21:8

The first two lists are written to two churches to warn believers. They list sins that are written in the present continuous, ie people doing these things are doing them repeatedly.

Sin is politically incorrect, it's offensive. Let's look at the first of these passages.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral (people who practice sexual intercourse outside of marriage) nor idolaters (people who put things before God) nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men^[a] ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards (includes getting high) nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Why is sin so serious?

A) it prevents you from knowing God until you become a Christian and He washes away all sin.

B) It impacts your relationship with God when you are a Christian if left unchecked.

C) It hurts those around you.

D) It can become a slippery slope away from God and eternity.

Those things being said, let's turn to one of the most horrific displays of the Holiness of God and God's repulsion with sin, seen anywhere in the Bible: Joshua, verses 19-26.

You will remember from last week, Jesus' plan was given to General Joshua and when Joshua followed through on the plan the walls came down.

Just prior to our text we learn that as the armies of Israel took the city they were to give God the first fruits of this first city, that is no silver, no gold, no valuable things were to be kept by individuals but dedicated to God. It was not that God needed the money but that God wanted their hearts and He knew that if they learnt to tithe as it were, dedicate the first part of their spoils back to God, it would keep their hearts from becoming greedy and driven by a lust for possessions.

No one in the conquest took anything from the city except a man called Achan. No one knew of Achan's disobedience until the boys went out to take a small town called Ai and suffered a terrible defeat. General Joshua was devastated, God you are with us. You do amazing things so that we win easily, what is going on?

And God says to Joshua, there is sin in the camp.

The next day Joshua has the nation pass in front of him, in iwi, in Hapu and then in small families, each time God narrowing down for Joshua where the sinner was until Achan was left standing before General Joshua. He must have been sweating buckets as Joshua was led by the Lord to whittle down the nation to His family, in fact his heart must have been Ach-an.

Let's stand:

Joshua 7:19-26 (CEV)

¹⁹ "Achan," Joshua said, "the LORD God of Israel has decided that you are guilty. Is this true? Tell me what you did, and don't try to hide anything."

²⁰ "It's true," Achan answered. "I sinned and disobeyed the LORD God of Israel. ²¹⁻²² While we were in Jericho, I saw a beautiful Babylonian robe, two hundred pieces of silver, and a gold bar that weighed the same as fifty pieces of gold. I wanted them for myself, so I took them. I dug a hole under my tent and hid the silver, the gold, and the robe."

Joshua had some people run to Achan's tent, where they found the silver, the gold, and the robe. ²³ They brought them back and put them in front of the sacred chest, so Joshua and the rest of the Israelites could see them. ²⁴ Then everyone took Achan and the things he had stolen to Trouble Valley.^[a] They also took along his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys, and sheep, his tent, and everything else that belonged to him.

²⁵ Joshua said, "Achan, you caused us a lot of trouble. Now the LORD is paying you back with the same kind of trouble."

The people of Israel then stoned to death Achan and his family. They made a fire and burned the bodies, together with what Achan had stolen, and all his possessions.²⁶ They covered the remains with a big pile of rocks, which is still there. Then the LORD stopped being angry with Israel.

That's how the place came to be called Trouble Valley.

Achan saw, as he helped take the city of Jericho, an amazing ultra- trendy, expensive garment made in Babylon and he wanted it as he did the silver and gold. He didn't stop and think about what he was doing. I mean, if he ever wore this garment in public everyone would ask hey, where did you get that from, but he took it anyway. Sin is usually like that. People act on impulse and they don't think through the inevitable consequences of their sin.

Achan discovered that when you sin, eventually you will be found out and people, often the people that you love most, will be hurt.

Over the years I have often heard Kiwis say, oh I only get drunk 3 or 4 times a year, I only watch a little porn, I only gossip from time to time, I only gamble a little, I do falsify my tax return or my time sheet but I am underpaid. Anyway, I am tough, if I get caught, I can handle it. The problem is that when something is brought to light, when a person gets caught out, it's not them alone who has to handle the consequences and the shame. When a person sins, there is usually a whole bunch of people who pay the price.

Mrs Achan, the little Achans, the livestock, Fluffy and Fido Achan. They all suffer because of one man's sin.

Romans 6:23 (NIV)

²³ For the wages (that is the consequences) of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in^[a] Christ Jesus our Lord.

When people sin, focus on 'I'. Do what feels right to them, something dies,

Firstly and foremost it affects their relationship with God, but there is always death in other relationships, in trust, in health, in finance.

For the wages of sin is death. Polluted, contaminated people, no matter how nice they appear to you and to me, will not enter a relationship with God nor will they be able to enter an unpolluted heaven.

If a person repents, that is, say sorry and ask for God's help to go the opposite direction away from the sin, God will turn up, He will forgive their sins and remember them no more, He will fill them with the Holy Spirit and give them the power to live differently. God is good!

But He is also Holy. Jesus said:

Galatians 6:6 (NIV)

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

If you are sowing seeds of pornography and flirtatiousness in your life expect marriage problems and your kids to struggle with being moral.

If you are sowing seeds of gossip and criticism, expect people to gossip about you and criticize you and not trust you.

No one plants a pumpkin seed and expects a Kauri tree to grow from it. Even when you are forgiven and trusting Jesus there will still be consequences to sin.

I want you to notice one final thing in closing.

Joshua 7

²⁶ They covered the remains with a big pile of rocks, which is still there. Then the LORD stopped being angry with Israel.

That's how the place came to be called Trouble Valley.

As is so often the case with God, when someone sins, when someone mucks up, while God never wants anyone to sin, He will take that humble, repentant person, He will take that ungodly choice and work something transformative out of it.

I want you to notice what God does with Trouble Valley in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 65:10 (CEV)

**¹⁰ My people will worship me.
Then the coastlands of Sharon
and the land as far
as Achor Valley^[a]
will turn into pastureland
where cattle and sheep
will feed and rest.**

The cross reference, the little (a) tells us that Achor Valley is in fact Trouble Valley.

Hosea 2:15 (CEV)

**¹⁵ I will return your vineyards,
and then Trouble Valley^[a]
will become Hopeful Valley.
You will say "Yes" to me
as you did in your youth,
when leaving Egypt.**

Achor Valley or Trouble Valley is the place where sinful Achan and his family, right through to his pet budgie were buried. It's a place aligned with sin and shame and death.

Over time God, our God, takes Trouble valley and transforms it into a place of prosperity, a place of rest and a place of Hope.

God never wants you and me to sin. I believe as Christians who are filled with His Holy Spirit, we are able not to sin, potentially. However if we do something stupid, impulsive, ungodly, yes we become contaminated, yes we become infected, polluted, but if we turn from our sins and ask His forgiveness and power, He will not only forgive us and cleanse us, He can take our weaknesses, our valley of trouble and turn it into a valley of rest and hope.

I have seen it so often. Someone might be struggling with the addiction to getting more stuff, greed, and they come to the Lord and repent, they ask His forgiveness and 2-3 years later they become profoundly generous givers to the things of the kingdom.

Someone might be struggling with gossip or criticism and they come to the Lord and turn from their sins and within a short period of time they become gifted at honouring and blessing and encouraging others.

Someone struggles with sexual sin and they humble themselves before God and turn from their wicked ways, years later they become awesome marriage counsellors or life coaches for people with a similar struggle.

What Satan intends for evil, to destroy you, if you would bring that thing to the Lord and take it seriously, let Jesus deal with the contamination, God can turn and use it for His glory.

But it all starts with repentance, no longer pretending it's OK to hide something under your tent or from your spouse.

Achan died for his own sins, and as horrific as this story seems to you and me, to a Holy and Pure God it was just.

Jesus has become our Achan, He has died in your place and mine so that we don't have to die.

If you are here this morning and you are not a Christian, God invites you to accept that Jesus has taken your punishment and invites you to a new life. He wants to take our valley of trouble and turn it into a valley of Hope. During this closing song, please come forward and take one of these little booklets and a free New Testament. After the service if you want to talk to someone about how to get a new start with God, please hang around at the front of the church.

If you are a Christian and you have been hiding things under your tent, please, please, please, don't kid yourself that it's OK. Come back to the Lord today, turn from your sin. I encourage you in this last song, just to drop to your knees wherever you are, tell the Lord you are sorry and ask Him for His power to live differently from today on. The Bible app **YouVersion** has studies on how to overcome any sin or temptation, I would encourage you to start retraining your mind today.

Let's stand for this closing song. If you want to have Jesus remove the sin from your life and join His family, come forward and take the booklet and book and remain at the front. If you are a believer struggling with sin, please drop to your knees during this song and repent, and retrain your mind this week.

Song...

Benediction:

As you have confessed your sins to God, you are forgiven! It is a new day; you get a new start. Now don't let your mind be conformed to the thinking of this age but let the Word of God transform your thinking and turn your valleys of trouble into valleys of rest and prosperity and hope.