

# No Cover for Cover-Ups

Lent 4 Evening Prayer

#1840

Joshua 7:16-26 & Matthew 27:1-31 (Passion Reading IV)

25 March 2020

*“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”* (Prov. 28:13) Achan sure excelled at concealing his transgressions. Truth is: so do we. But there’s no cover for cover-ups. You see, when we try to cover up our sins, God will make sure that they, and we, are exposed. That’s what we cover-ups have to look forward to on the Last Day.

Achan’s greedy sin and cover up actually began with the Lord’s glorious victory over the city of Jericho. They marched around the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. They blew their trumpets, the walls came tumbling down, and Israel rushed in to conquer, just as God had promised. It was a glorious victory and a joyous day. But God had also given two clear mandates—first: *“keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction”*; and second: *“all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”* (Josh. 6:18-19)

Then Israel turned to its next target for conquest, the city of Ai. Things went much differently. Intoxicated by the victory at Jericho, they assumed they would conquer yet again. But no! They received the thumping of a lifetime; they got their clocks royally cleaned; and God Himself made sure of it. Despair descended on all Israel. Joshua

tore his clothes in humble lamentation. “What happened, Lord? Have you rescued us from Egypt just to turn us over to the godless pagans of Canaan-land?” And how did God respond to being put on trial by his puny, defeated general? “Come on, Joshua! Get up! Man up! *‘Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.’*” (Josh. 7:12)

Can’t you just see Joshua dropping his jaw and scratching his head in confusion? “We, Israel, have sinned? We have taken Your possessions, the spoils from Jericho? No way! We heard Your instruction. We followed Your commands. What on earth is happening?”

The Lord, though, told Joshua how to root out the lone culprit of the people’s demise. The whole people of Israel consecrated themselves and presented themselves before Joshua and before God. Then came the process of elimination: the tribe of Judah was singled out, from them the clan of Zerah, from them the household of Zabdi, and finally Achan, the son of Carmi, the suspect and culprit. The sin of this one man, from this one household in this one clan of the one tribe had spoiled things for all Israel, the whole nation, all the people. Other people died because of Achan’s sin!

*“Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.’* One man’s sin of greed

and theft had handicapped the whole people of God. Joshua implored Achan to give glory to God by confessing his specific, concrete sins of greed and theft to him, a fellow sinner.

You see, we all sin because we're all sinners. And when we sin as individual sinners, we affect and trouble the people around us, especially the whole people of God called the Church. It's like throwing a single stone into a large pond. It's only a small piece of rock, but the moment it splashes into the still water, the ripples emanate outward and affect the whole body of water. When one of us commits sin—the single stone tossed into the water—the whole body of Christ is disturbed by the affects that ripple outward. And so, we confess.

*“Achan answered Joshua, ‘Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.’”* (Josh. 7:20-21)

See how Achan gave glory to God: by getting specific in confessing his sins. Not just: “I coveted and stole something,” but: “I coveted and stole that beautiful cloak, that silver and that gold. And I’ve hidden them in my tent.”

Will we confess our specific sins? In agonizing detail? To a fellow sinner, usually our pastor? Will we confess at the altar rail before the pastor that we get just as greedy as

Achan did? Will we expose our sinful stealing such as cheating on those income taxes, or keeping the extra change we mistakenly received, or getting paid for goofing off at work? Will we admit that we actually do steal from God Himself by thinking and claiming that our money and goods belong to us, not to Him, and by living that lie when we give cheaply in the offering or neglect to help our needy neighbor?

I know: Scandalous! But Joshua did call it giving glory to God, even when confessing to a fellow sinner. After all, why should we be nervous about confessing the dirty details of our rotten sins to a fellow sinner who has his own dirty, rotten specific sins? That sinner cannot do anything to us. In fact, he may even be able to relate to us, in that twisted misery-loves-company sort of way. We really should tremble, though, to confess our sins “directly to God,” as we often say. Why? Because He can – and He does – do something about them! Jesus said, *“do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* (Mt. 10:28) Confessing sins to a fellow sinner certainly does not kill the body, but what about the rest of that verse? Well, it still applies. Bury your sin, and God will bury you!

Joshua sent his messengers to find and verify Achan’s stash of stolen goods, and it was there. Then Achan received his just desserts for his sin that troubled all of Israel: he and his family were stoned with stones and burned with fire. What?! No absolution? No forgiveness?

No second chance? No...? No. Should we think that Achan's confession somehow deserved God's response of absolution? God's mercy is not founded on Achan's confession – nor yours, nor mine. No, your confession is where the Achan in you must simply die. No putting the coin of your confession in the heavenly vending machine for absolution to pop out on queue. Just stark, repentant confession that says, *“Truly I have sinned against the LORD God.”* Then leave it there, and realize the Lord can, does, and will have His way. No cover up for us cover-ups, not even in our confessing.

When we confess, we do pray with Psalm 38(:21-22): *“Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation.”* And with the Lord Jesus who suffered mock trial, unjust verdict, cruel mockery, and torturous crucifixion, our God does hasten to help. No, He did not help Achan, but He does promise to help you, to be your salvation. When you bury your sins, God will bury you. But when you expose your sins in confession, God will bury them with His Son hanging from a cross and buried in a tomb. You see, that's where His true love for sinners is truly exposed—not in the anguish of confessing, not in suffering the just desserts of our sins, but in the glory of Christ crucified, buried and risen. And when He absolves in His mercy, he does not bring the Achan in you back to life. No, He gives you His life, His contentment, His trust in the God who is your salvation.

So we do not cover up, but we confess. And we sing with the hymn:

*“O Jesus, let Thy precious blood  
Be to my soul a cleansing flood.  
Turn not, O Lord, Thy guest away,  
But grant that justified I may  
Go to my house at peace with Thee:  
O God, be merciful to me.”* (LSB 613:3)

His blood does cover. His peace does go with you. Yes, He is merciful to you. Amen.