

This old story draws our attention to how interesting it is, how one little decision can change your life. I think all of us here can attest to a decision that we made that changed our lives. I found my life partner when I wasn't looking. I inquired about some courses of study and ended up with the job I have. These are decisions I can say change my life forever. Decisions determine destinies. It is so important that we learn how to make quality decisions. Without them we will live a life of regret while with them, we can have the possibility to enjoy success.

It is easy to talk about the positive choices that you have made, but what about the negative? Through the years I have made my share of doozies. Some of them have affected me long term while others were only momentary.

Pastor Marty Barker told a story about John D. Rockefeller, Sr., who got into a taxi one day to go to a meeting. The cab driver recognized him and said to him, *Mr. Rockefeller, I have some money to invest. Can you advise me?* **Sure**, said Rockefeller, ***you need to make good decisions.*** The driver responded, *thanks for the tip but how can I learn to make good decisions?* **Experience**, replied Rockefeller. *How can I get experience?* ***By making bad decisions.***

The lesson today introduces us to a man named, Achan. He made some bad decisions that cost him life in the Promised Land. For years he had wandered around the desert and finally with the nation of Israel, crossed the river Jordan, marched around Jericho and watched as the walls miraculously tumble down. At that moment, he and the rest of the Israelites took possession of the city. They were given specific instructions as to what to do. They were to find Rahab and her family; collect the gold, silver, iron and bronze and place it in the Lord's treasury. This was a historical day and the chapter concludes: *So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.* (Joshua 6:27). Victory was in the air. It was one of the greatest miracles ever recorded in history and they wear eye witnesses!

The first word in Chapter 7 speaks volumes. *But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan, son of Carmi, 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.* Notice the word, **But**. This three-letter word speaks volumes and sounds an alarm like a foghorn. How many of you have been involved in a conversation that went something like this:

I made it to work on time, but I got a speeding ticket.

I bought a new dress on sale, but it was \$200.

Dad, I'm okay, but the car is a wreck.

The Israelites were victorious, but there was sin in the camp. Achan took some of the recovered things and hid them in his tent. No one knew about it – or so he thought. But God knew, and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel (Joshua 7:2-5). The story unfolds in verses 2-5. Joshua sent some men to spy out the region of Ai. They came back and reported that it was not a big deal and that they would not need all the people – they said to send 2,000 to 3,000 men so as not to wear everyone out, because there were only a few people there. We know the story from there quite well. Joshua took the counsel of the spies but didn't take time to pray about it. He had the men act immediately, and immediately they were defeated. How ironic this is. The little city of Ai chased the 3000 soldiers back to Jericho - there were 36 fatalities. They had just finished marching around the walls of Jericho 13 times with the whole army exposed and not one fatality. The defeat of Ai was devastating and the battle destroyed the morale of the people as recorded in v.5, *the hearts of the people melted and turned to water*.

Ai represents a battle fought under their own strength, leaving God out of the equation. There is no mention of prayer before the second battle. After the defeat, Joshua fell on his face and cried to the Lord pleading to understand what went wrong. How many times do we go running to God after our defeats or our set backs? We don't take time to pray, to worship, take communion, read His Word, and then the proverbial bottom drops out. Joshua fell on his face before God and the elders did the same. They sprinkled dust on their heads to signify humility. Then Joshua asked three questions and made two statements.

**Q.1: *Why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?*** Joshua acts as though God was not in control or that God had tricked them or had made a mistake. How many times do we become pious or religious but deny God's authority in our lives?

Then his statement: ***If we had only been content to stay on the other side of Jordan!*** Joshua allowed the negative to cloud his vision. He focused on the ***good old days!*** on the other side of the Jordan. How many of you have thought of a day

in another time and place that was so wonderful and much better than the present? There are some of those *Good Old Days* that are good for telling stories, but I pray with thanksgiving that they are in the past and that they will never have to be experienced again. Joshua assumed that since they were defeated that they could never move forward again. God is never limited by our defeats. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes.* (Romans 8:28).

**Q. 2: *What can I say Lord?*** Israel has been chased away by the enemies. Joshua began to doubt his ability to lead the Army. He was hurt and let down and felt the people blaming him for what happened.

Then his statement: *The other people will hear about this and will wipe us and our name off the face of the earth.* Joshua was concerned about the impact of this defeat and their relationship with the other nations. He was scared that the others were going to go on the offensive.

**Q.3: *What then will you do for your own great name?*** Joshua was concerned that this defeat would bring reproach against God. Then in verse 10 God speaks, *Joshua, stand up! Nothing is ever accomplished with our face in the dirt or with our eyes on our failures and problems* (Joshua 7:10). God is telling him that it is time to deal with the problem. This is a problem that cannot be ignored and it cannot be forgotten. It must be dealt with. Thus the lesson continues in verses 11-13. Israel had sinned and overstep the boundary (or covenant). They had stolen and lied – notice there is a snowballing effect of sin. God tells them that they can turn their backs and run but they will be on their own until they deal with the one who is responsible for the destruction. *You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it (that which is causing the destruction).*

The teaching is clear and there is no suggestion that it was going to be simple. The principle is that sin must be dealt with. You cannot continue in the land of victory with sin in your life. They were told to *consecrate* themselves – to prepare to deal with the problem. He called the problem to their attention and the consequences of that action.

Joshua called the men forward one by one and when he spoke to Achan, he told him to give glory to God, give him praise and tell the truth of what he had done. *I have sinned against the Lord! And this is what I have done. I saw... I plundered... I coveted ... I stole ...I hid them.* You can read the rest of the story again

Here we learn from this ancient text that God does not tolerate sin in our lives, and yes, one sin can make a difference. We learn also that sin is never purely private. Sin affects not only the sinner, but also others who are in relationship with an individual. Unchecked sin by one can pull down another, even everyone who is around.

Through this lesson clarified in God's Word, sin will eventually be revealed. *But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord: and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.* (Numbers 32:23)

Our call today is that you confess your failures and the things that cause them. We then must strive to learn from our setbacks, and finally, we must understand that God has a plan of recovery for everyone.

Yes, I believe we can agree from this text this morning, **one little decision can make a big difference.** Amen.