Proverbs 28:13 *Sorry! Concealing Sin*

***Achan***The Israelites were flush with excitement. They had just done what no one had thought possible: they had taken the city of Jericho! It’s walls lay in ruin, it’s fighting men destroyed and, even more amazingly, not a single Israelite had been harmed in the battle.

It was the LORD’s doing, of course. The battle of Jericho couldn’t really be called a battle. For 7 days the people had marched around the city with the priests in the lead, and on the 7th day, with a trumpet blast and a shout, the mighty walls of the city had come down.

Now the daunting task of taking the land, which had caused the Israelites so much fear, looked like a foregone conclusion. With God on their side, the Promised Land really would be theirs.

And so, when Joshua sent out scouts to examine the next city, they came back confident. The city was Ai, and the scouts assured Joshua it would be an easy victory. “Don’t bother to assemble the entire army,” they said, “there are just a few men there, send two or three thousand and the city will be ours.”

So that’s what Joshua did, and the results were disastrous. The lightly guarded city of Ai routed the Israelite expeditionary force, and 36 soldiers lost their lives.

Suddenly, the courage of the Israelites melted like ice in the noonday sun. Joshua and the other elders threw themselves on the ground before the Lord and begged for explanation. They thought Jericho had been a sign that God would deliver the Promised Land into their hands; and now this rout made it appear that God had abandoned them.

God did not owe them an explanation, but He gave one anyway.

At the outset of the conquest, God had made it clear that there should be no plunder taken. This was not typical of the time. In fact, for most of world history, the way kings would raise up armies was with the promise that any spoils of war were available for the fighting men to keep. But the conquest was not meant to be a war of personal enrichment. It was judgment against the Canaanites and a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. Thus, God made it clear before the march around Jericho that no riches were to be taken. He called them the “devoted things.”

Now, God revealed that the disaster at Ai was the result of the ban against taking devoted things being broken.

And so, the next day Joshua had the entire camp assemble by tribe. Lots were cast and the tribe of Judah was chosen. The clans of Judah stepped forward and the clan of Zerah was chosen. Then the family of Zimri, and so on, until a man named Achan son of Carmi was standing alone.

Joshua said to him: “Give glory to the LORD…tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

And, to Achan’s credit, he did. **Joshua 7:20-21:**

**20**Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: **21**When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

It was Achan’s hidden sin that created trouble for all of Israel. And, in the end, Achan and his family paid a step price for his sin.

***Proverbs 28:13***Today we are beginning a three-week series called ***Sorry!*** It has nothing to do with the board game—though obviously we’ve borrowed a little from the game for our décor—but has everything to do with the importance of apologizing. We’re going to spend three weeks talking about what to do when we mess up, and how to forgive one another when it happens.

Our key verse for the next three weeks is going to be **Proverbs 28:13**. It might not be the most well-known verse in the Bible, but I hope that over the next three weeks we’ll all come to know it well. It is a good verse for teaching us the importance of apology. Here’s what it says:

**13**Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,
    but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Proverbs are kind of like forks in the road. So many of the individual Proverbs give two choices: the way of the wise, and the way of the foolish. The way that leads to life and blessing and success; or the way that leads to death and cursing and destitution.

And this Proverb works the same way. When it comes to sin—the mistakes and wrongdoing and hurtful things we do—we have two choices: we can conceal it, or we can confess it. We can choose the path of foolishness—which does not prosper, or we can choose the path of wisdom—which leads to mercy.

The Proverb gives us two choices, but we’re going to spend three weeks on this verse. A three part series: first we’ll talk about what happens when we **conceal sin**; then we’ll talk about **confessing sin**; and the third week we’ll talk about finding mercy. To keep with the alliteration, I’ll call that week **cancelling sin**. That week we’ll talk about forgiveness.

Let’s start with this choice of **concealing sin**. The word “conceal” here means to cover, and has the idea of a cover up. It’s one of the first instincts we all have whenever we do something wrong: to hope no one notices, to hide it from view, to make it a secret. The word “hidden” is one of the key words in the Achan story. When he took the devoted things, he hid them in his tent. He tried to cover it up. He tried to conceal it.

Another Biblical example is the way Joseph’s brothers tried to hide their sin after they had sold him into slavery. They took his fancy coat and dipped it in a goat’s blood and brought it to their father Jacob, leaving him to conclude that his favorite son had been killed by a wild animal. Just as with Achan’s sin, eventually the cover on this story was blown as well.

The point of the Proverb is that those who attempt to conceal their sin do not prosper. I take that to mean that eventually your sins are going to be found out. The chickens will come home to roost, as the saying goes. And when that happens—if you’ve been covering up—it’s not going to go well. We have seen this on the national stage when the misdeeds of politicians or preachers have become public. They fall quickly.

More than that—and, again, on the interpersonal level—I take this verse to mean that if you never own up to your failings, people aren’t going to like you. If you never admit to being wrong, people are going to find you arrogant and pompous and unpleasant to be around. And you’re not going to prosper. In business. But also in your relationships. In your marriage and in your family, if you are always acting as though you don’t sin, things are going to be tough.

So let’s talk about what happens when we conceal sin. I have four things I want to mention:

***Nobody Is Perfect***First, when we conceal sin, **we deny the obvious.** When we act like we never make a mistake, when we pretend like we never do anything wrong, when we refuse to ever take responsibility for our actions, we are denying something that is pretty obvious to everyone else around us.

Here’s a verse (and for this sermon I’m going to be sharing several verses from around the Bible). **1 John 1:8:**

**8**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

God essentially says to us: “Who are you kidding?” If you want to act like you are perfect, if you never want to admit your failings, you are simply lying to yourself. And to others. And to God.

But the thing is: God and those around you see right through it. The only one you are deceiving is yourself.

The Bible makes it pretty clear that we all sin. Another verse, I won’t put it on the screen, is Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” It’s not O.K. It’s not an excuse. But we’re kidding ourselves if we think we are the exception to the “all have sinned” rule.

In fact, here’s a phrase that might be useful to repeat to ourselves: **“Nobody’s perfect.”** Nobody’s perfect.

Now, be careful with that. Sometimes when we are confronted with a mistake that we can no longer hide or deny we’ll snap “Nobody’s perfect” like that’s an excuse and people should just get off our backs and just accept that things happen. Sometimes we’ll use that phrase “nobody’s perfect” to imply that really, everybody else is at fault, because they shouldn’t have expected us to do the right thing in the first place. If we weaponize the phrase “nobody’s perfect” like that, we’re doing it wrong.

But, may I suggest, that sometimes when we are having a hard time owning up to a mistake, or when we feel like it shows some sort of intolerable weakness to admit that we are wrong—or if we are the kind of people who feel like we are always justified in everything we do (and really, who among us isn’t like that sometimes?)—may I suggest that maybe we need to say—quietly, to ourselves—“Nobody’s perfect. And that includes me.”

Sometimes we need to get ahold of ourselves and say: “Who am I kidding? Why I am I trying to claim I’m in the right when everybody else knows I’m in the wrong? If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. I’m not perfect. I might just as well admit it.”

When we conceal sin we are denying the obvious.

***Agree/Disagree***Second, when we conceal sin, **we blame shift**. When we are unwilling to admit that we have done something wrong we usually end up making the problem someone or something else’s responsibility. We rationalize our sin as something beyond our control.

Exhibit A of this kind of behavior is the way Adam responded when confronted after the very first sin. **Genesis 3:12:**

**12**The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

You see what he did there? It’s despicable. The woman! It’s her fault! She gave me some fruit from the tree. He shifts the blame to her.

But he does something even more despicable. Notice how he describes the woman: she’s “the woman you put here with me.” You put her here, God! So really, this is all your fault! I couldn’t help it.

Blame shifting is excuse making. There’s always a reason for what we did, an explanation. A justification: “I was in a hurry, so I fudged the numbers to make everything balance.” “They were yelling, so I started yelling.” “I shouldn’t have hit you, but you made me so mad.”

A blogger named Don Straka writes:

These excuses try to trick us into accepting sin because it was my wife’s fault, or traffic’s fault, or because it was a result of my exhaustion. In short, excuses make sin an inevitable outcome, instead of a deadly killer.

Instead of owning our sin, we have a tendency to explain it away. Instead of fighting against sin, we have a tendency put the blame on someone or something else. Straka goes on:

Situations do not cause people to sin; we choose to sin. Work may put stress on you, but you choose to cut corners. Your wife may unfairly criticize you, but you choose to respond with passive aggression. Traffic may be heavy, but you choose to respond with angry outbursts all the way to work. Circumstances do not force us to sin. They only help reveal our sin. No matter how much the cards may seem stacked against us, our sin is always a choice we make…We can’t give up fighting sin just because we can explain how it happened. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-excuse-your-own-sin>

Something we can learn to do to fight against blame shifting is to make **“agree/disagree”** statements. This comes from a book by Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas called *When Sorry Isn’t Enough.* And “agree/disagree” statements work like this:

I *agree* that I have a right to feel hurt, angry, disappointed, and frustrated or whatever else I may be feeling. I don’t choose my feelings; I simply experience them.

On the other hand, I *disagree* with the idea that because of my feelings, I have the right to hurt someone else with my words or behavior. (p. 38)

I agree that this situation is not ideal; but I disagree that it gives me justification for reacting in a sinful way. I agree that things were difficult; but I disagree that it made it OK for me to do what I did.

When we conceal sin we are shifting blame.

***Jesus is Watching***Third, when we conceal our sin, **we act like God is blind.** When we cover-up and try to keep our sin secret—especially when we are certain no other human being knows about it and thus assume we have gotten away with it—we are forgetting that God knows everything. **Numbers 32:23:**

**23**“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.”

Sooner or later, our sins always catch up with us—always. Sometimes they catch up with us quickly and forcefully; sometimes it happens only gradually or over a long period of time. But eventually we will pay the price when we rebel against God, either now or in eternity.

God is not blind. God sees. God knows. And it matters.

I was reminded of a story I heard many years ago: A cat burglar was entering a dark house when he heard a voice say: “Jesus is watching you.” Startled, the man had to remind himself that he had watched the homeowners drive away. He had done his surveillance, he knew the house was empty. But then he heard the voice again: “Jesus is watching you.” Shaken, the burglar decided it must be his guilty conscience. He got a flashlight out and began to play it on the walls. That’s when he noticed a bird cage with a large parrot in it. Again the voice said: “Jesus is watching you.” Chuckling, the man said: “And I suppose your name is Jesus?” “Nope,” said the bird, “my name is Moses.” “Well then, who is Jesus?” At that moment, the beam of the flashlight lowered below the bird cage onto a large and angry looking Rottweiler. The bird said: “Sic em, Jesus!”

Here’s another thing we can learn to say to ourselves: “**Jesus is watching.”**

That’s not meant to be threatening. It’s not supposed to be scary. But it is the truth.

We might think we can hide our sins from others, but we can’t hide them from God. Nobody else knew that Achan had hidden that stuff in his tent; but God knew.

God is not blind. And sooner our later our sins will find us out.

***If Christ Died for It, It’s a Big Deal***Then, fourth, when we conceal sin, **we are minimizing it**. When we refuse to take responsibility for our errors we give the impression that wrongdoing is insignificant—or worse, that the person we have injured is insignificant. When we try to sweep our sins under the rug, we are saying they are no big deal anyway.

Listen to **1 John 1:10**, just a few verses after the one I quoted in the first point:

**10**If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

When we conceal our sin, when we say it is just a small thing, we are saying that God is wrong in His judgment. Whenever we say something like “It can’t be that bad…” or “All I did was…” we are trivializing the truth of God’s word.

Moreover, when we say things like that to people we have hurt or wounded, we trivialize them. We are saying that their pain, their feelings, their loss is not worthy of our concern or consideration.

When we say “I don’t see why you are making such a fuss over that…” we are sending a message that the effects our behavior has on others is not important to us. We are being disrespectful to the people we have harmed and to everyone around us. It makes us appear manipulative.

Worst of all, when we minimize sin we minimize the cost paid by our Savior to rescue us from it.

We just finished a series where I told a lot of stories about Martin Luther. When I was working on this sermon, I ran across another quote from him that is **quite challenging:**

The force and power of sin is amplified by these words: “Who gave Himself for our sins.” (Gal. 1:4) We are indifferent, and we regard sin as something trivial, a mere nothing… But we should note here the infinite greatness of the price paid for it. Then it will be evident that its power is so great that it could not be removed by any means except that the Son of God be given for it. Anyone who considers this carefully will understand that this one word “sin” includes the eternal wrath of God and the entire kingdom of Satan, and that sin is no trifle.  (Luther’s Lectures on Galatians, LW 26, p33)

Sin is no trifle. And so, if we are tempted to minimize or trivialize our sins, here is something else we should learn to say to ourselves: **“If Christ died for it, it is a big deal.”** If it was serious enough to require the sacrifice of the eternal Son of God in order to remove it’s penalty from my life, then my sin is not something I can just shrug off or wave away with the pass of a hand.

Sin is sin. And when we are aware of it in our lives we should not pretend it is a small thing.

***Take Responsibility*Proverbs 28:13**, our key verse again:

**13**Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,
    but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

The opposite of concealing sin is to confess and renounce it. That’s the wise choice. We’ll look at that more next week, when we talk about apologizing.

But in preparation for that, let me suggest one thing we can all work on, so that we are not people who are known for concealing sin: **Take responsibility.**

The first step toward being good at apologizing is the ability to accept responsibility for our actions. Chapman and Thomas write:

At the heart of accepting responsibility for one’s behavior is the willingness to admit “I was wrong.”

They quote a doctor named Spencer Johnson:

Few things are more powerful than having the common sense, wisdom, and strength to admit when you’ve made a mistake and to set things right. (pg. 35)

Instead of denying the obvious, shifting the blame, pretending that God is blind, or minimizing sin; a sure sign of spiritual maturity is the willingness to take responsibility for our wrongs.

Here are three things to help us do this well:

**Be First.** One of the best things we can learn to do is to own up to our mistakes before anybody calls us on them. Instead of hiding our errors and hoping nobody notices, or hoping that if they do notice they might not realize it was us, we should go to the people affected and take responsibility right away.

**Be Honest.** The five “D’s” of dodgeball are Dodge, Duck, Dip, Dive and Dodge. A lot of times when we are confronted with our mistakes, we want to play dodgeball. We dodge, duck, dip, dive and dodge. As we’ve talked about, we like to rationalize and minimize. We want to spin the situation so we don’t look so bad.

But if we are going to take responsibility for our mistakes, then we are going to have to be honest about what we did wrong. No ducking or diving. No dodging. Just honesty.

And, third, **Be brave.** I read a quote this week, but I lost track of the citation. It said:

Making mistakes is human, admitting mistakes is heroic.

It’s not easy to say: “I was wrong.” It damages our pride… our picture of ourselves… the way we want to be seen by others... to admit that we messed up. It takes great courage walk down the pathway of confession.

But at the end of that pathway is mercy. Our friends and our family already know we are not perfect, they just want to hear us admit it. Same goes for God. He knows better than anybody about all our failures and falls. There’s no sin He doesn’t already know. So let the truth be told.

Chapman and Thomas include the following blog post from a woman named Reese Andrews. I want to end this morning with this:

My youngest son, Asher, is ten years old. He has epilepsy and cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. Yesterday, as my husband was helping load Asher and his wheelchair onto his school bus, a young woman drover her car slowly past the stopped bus. She knew what she was doing. She caught my husband’s eye as she approached the end of the bus and he watched her drive through the intersection and away.

I wish I could tell you this was an unusual occurrence, but unfortunately it happens at least once a month. Someone is too busy, in too much of a hurry to stop while a bus is loading or unloading kids. What happened next, however, was totally out of the norm.

About an hour later we heard a knock at the front door. It was the woman who had driven past the bus. She was shaking.

“I am so sorry for what I did. It was so disrespectful to your son and your family.”

We were stunned.

“I was in a hurry. I was running late, I knew I should have stopped—that’s why I went so slowly—but all I was thinking about was where I needed to be. I am so sorry.”

Yes, she had absolutely done something wrong. She had, in fact, broken the law. But I have never encountered someone with such pain and remorse. I couldn’t believe she had the sheer guts to come to our door to apologize, not know the reaction she might get from us…What really hit me was that she was taking full responsibility for her actions. How often does that happen?

…She was on our doorstep, physically shaking with anguish at what she had done. She needed to hear she was forgiven.

“Thank you so much. I really appreciate that,” my husband told her.

She smiled, weakly but gratefully, apologized again, and left.

I think all of us came away from that experience better of it and with a deep appreciation for the power of being human. (pg. 35-36 of Chapman, Thomas)