The Door of Hope

SPEAKER	Joe Friedman
DATE	Sunday, August 6, 2023
PASSAGES	Joshua 7:19-26; Hosea 2:14-15; Joshua 6:18-19; Jeremiah 17:9; Genesis 3:14-15; Matthew 6:21; Psalm 139:23-24
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:08:53 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The world is broken, and the reason is a word most people would rather not use. Joe traced that word in slow motion through one man's confession in Joshua 7 — gaze, weight, covet, take — and then showed where God takes it. The valley named Trouble is the place he chose to put a door of hope.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Education, social conditions and psychology all name real symptoms of a broken world. None of them explains why the human heart is bent in the first place.
- Achan knew the penalty for taking the devoted things was death, and took them anyway. Sin is not an information problem. “It's never about what you know — it's always about what we crave.”
- “You never do sin; sin does you.” The pull is deeper and more automatic than we like to admit.
- You cannot break any of the last nine commandments until you have already broken the first one. Every sin begins as something given God's place.
- Sin has a sequence: we gaze, we give the thing weight and glory, we covet it, and then taking it is only paperwork. The place to interrupt it is the gaze.
- Nothing we do is private. Achan's household and the whole camp carried what he hid in his tent. “Every time I give in to the temptation, I weaken this community.”
- Hosea's “therefore” is not the one anyone expects: she forgot me, *therefore* I will allure her. God answers forgetting with wooing.

- The surge of craving itself is a door of hope, because it is the moment you can finally see what you actually worship — and repent.

▶ 1:08:53

Joe Friedman leads Hope's Men's Ministry, has been part of this church for almost ten years, and opened by admitting that what he was about to say was obvious. His mother, he said, had a disconcerting habit of telling the whole truth — including that her son had "a gift for stating the obvious." So he stated one: the world is broken.

Shocked, and not shocked

▶ 1:11:46

The illustration was *Casablanca* — Louis, ordered to shut down Rick's and needing a pretext, announcing that he is shocked, *shocked*, to find gambling going on in this establishment, just as the croupier hands him his winnings. Joe's point was that he is not playing Louis. He means it. Greed, cruelty, injustice, disease, wars, famine, loneliness, despair, bodies falling apart, friendships quietly waning — he keeps being genuinely surprised by all of it.

And the surprise is itself evidence. We are shocked because we know it was not supposed to be this way. The service had opened with the reading of God's word to the serpent in the garden, Genesis 3:14–15 — the first announcement that the damage would be undone. A Christian knows that one day every wrong is righted and every tear wiped away. In the meantime, "what's wrong with the world" is the conversation Joe has with nearly everyone he meets.

The word nobody wants

▶ 1:14:10

Ask a Christian why the world is broken and the answer is one word — and, Joe noted, right there we part company with a great deal of Austin. *Sin* strikes people as harsh, judgmental, a power play designed to make them feel guilty. Sometimes it has been used that way. The substitutes on offer are gentler: bad decisions, mistakes, low self-esteem, a neurotic preoccupation with religiously imposed guilt. A friend of his, asked how things were back in America, said: "We're not into repentance anymore. We're into sin management."

Education has been with us since the Greeks and has not fixed it. Injustice and psychology are real, but they are downstream. None of them reaches the root — and the root was named a long time ago.

> “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”
>
> JEREMIAH 17:9 ↗

Good question, Joe said. So here is the question of the day: how do we cure our hearts? Three movements — the depth of the sinful condition of our hearts, the process by which sin works in us, and the cure. “I'm an administrator. I can't help it. I've got to talk about process.”

Achan and the devoted things

▶ 1:17:01

The story is Joshua 7. Israel has taken Jericho; Achan has taken some of the plunder.

> “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.' And 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.'”
>
> JOSHUA 7:19–21 ↗

▶ 1:19:16

The command he broke had been given in the open, to everyone, at the wall of Jericho.

> “But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. But 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.”
>
> JOSHUA 6:18–19 ↗

Joe set aside the larger argument about the conquest of Canaan — “that's a whole different sermon” — to make one point about the command itself. This was not a campaign for national prestige or private enrichment. “You are not pirates. You are not freebooters.” The wealth was for the house where God would dwell in their midst. No nation had ever waged a campaign on that basis, and it went to the integrity of God's own name. So the command was direct, and breaking it was a capital offense. “You're not going to get a ticket. You're not going to get a warning.”

Then came Ai — a town the scouts said needed two or three thousand men — and Israel was routed and lost thirty-six (Joshua 7:5). Thirty-six sounds survivable until you remember the terror it took to begin this campaign at all. Joe's picture: five minutes after you sign for the house, you find the crack in the foundation and the termites in the walls. The people's hearts melted and became like water. Joshua tore his clothes and lay on his face until evening. And the answer he got was not comfort.

> "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. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies."
>
> JOSHUA 7:11–12 ↗

1. How deep the craving goes

▶ 1:26:59

This is why Joe spent so long on how public the command had been. Achan knew. He knew the consequence was catastrophic no matter how it came down, and he did it anyway. "Our pastor used to say: you never do sin — sin does you."

▶ 1:28:16

We protect ourselves with the thought that we would never risk that much for a robe. Maybe not. But there is something in every one of us we are willing to break with God over — and it always runs through the same door. "You can't break any of the last nine commandments until you've broken the first one": "You shall have no other gods before me." *Before* not as in standing in front of, but as in counting for more. Joe's own small example: the lie about never receiving the email, told because your opinion of him mattered more than the truth.

He was a smoker for years, and read the surgeon general's warning on the pack many times. "There has never been a smoker in the history of the world who looked at that and went, oh my gosh, this could kill me, I had no idea." It is not about the knowledge. We will do nearly anything to get whatever we have given ultimate value.

2. Sin in slow motion

▶ 1:30:28

Before the confession, Joshua says something that sounds redundant — *give glory to God* — when he already knows who is guilty. Joe's reading: the Hebrew word behind "glory" also carries the sense of

weight. Gravitas. Importance. Joshua is telling Achan to put God back in his rightful place first, and then, if he dares, lie.

▶ 1:32:42

The confession that follows is sin filmed at high frame rate. Joe reached for the superhero convention — the Flash moving so fast that the weapon thrown at him hangs in the air long enough to be examined and plucked out of it. “Wouldn't you like to do that when sin comes at you?”

▶ 1:34:33

I saw. Not noticed — beheld. “The things that tempt us, we don't just see them. We gaze at them. We fondle them on the palate of our imagination. We drink them in with our eyes.” The French, he noted, say it better: *I rinse my eye.* The first step is always giving ourselves permission to dwell on something we want more than obedience. Underneath it is a quiet distrust — the suspicion that God is a bit like your grandmother. You love her, she is right about everything, and while you are playing gin rummy with her you are thinking about the uncle who slips you a beer.

Two hundred shekels of silver, a bar of gold weighing fifty. Joe pressed on the numbers. Nobody assays plunder at a glance. “How good are you at counting beans in a jar?” Achan did not see a weight; he dwelt on it until he knew it. That is what adoration looks like before it has a name.

▶ 1:37:29

I coveted them. Now it is open. Never mind the command, never mind the death penalty — I want this more. Which is precisely Jesus' diagnostic: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Achan is all in for these objects over the God who brought his whole family out of slavery through visible wonders and fed them for forty years.

I took them. “As inevitable as an avalanche.” Gazing, weighing, coveting, taking — and taking is a word of commitment. We use it at weddings.

What one man's tent did to everyone

▶ 1:39:59

Joshua's messengers ran to the tent and found it exactly as Achan had described — the plunder hidden there, the silver underneath — and they carried it back and spread it all out before the Lord (Joshua 7:22–23). Then the hardest part of the chapter: Achan, the silver, the robe, the gold, his sons and daughters, his livestock, his tent, everything — taken out to the valley, stoned, burned, buried under a heap of stones that is there to this day (Joshua 7:24–26). Only then, the text says, did the Lord turn from his fierce anger. Why all of them?

▶ 1:41:09

Joe did not pretend to close that question — "that's another sermon," the same question we could ask about Adam, and he has heard someone say of Eve, "I could just slap her" — but he named what it establishes. "We are not in a vacuum. We are not alone. What we do affects our community. Every time I give in to the temptation, I weaken this community." The valley took its name from the episode: Achor, trouble. And because of Adam and Eve, he added, all of us are born into a valley of trouble.

3. The valley of trouble, and the door in it

▶ 1:41:52

Hundreds of years later a prophet picks up the name of that valley and does something extraordinary with it.

> "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt."
>
> HOSEA 2:14–15 ↗

The oracle does not stop there, and the tenderness keeps escalating. In that day she will call him husband and never again master, and the names of the Baals are taken out of her mouth so that they are not so much as spoken again. "You should really reread Hosea, because this is mind-blowing — the tenderness and the overwhelming love that pours out of God in this is incredible."

▶ 1:43:11

"Therefore" always points back. So Joe read what it points back to:
"I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals… she went after her lovers and forgot me." She forgot me — *therefore* I will woo her. Therefore I will restore her. Therefore I will take the most dreadful place in her history and make it a door. Therefore she will speak to me as a wife speaks to a husband, not as a slave to a master. And the bride in view may not be Israel only — "you get the sense that God is also talking about the church, which is to be his bride." "Does this not melt your heart?"

The cure, in three steps

▶ 1:44:28

First, be aware of what you are looking at. "Don't walk around on autopilot." What do I gaze at? What do I imagine having, if only? What temptation have I normalized because I half like it? He had seen a t-

shirt for sale that inverted the familiar one — not *Not today, Satan* but *Maybe today, Satan*. "It's funny, but I wouldn't wear it." The trouble with normalizing is that you do not notice yourself doing it. Joe told of a friend, a woman of real and vibrant faith, who recommended a novel that turned out to be unreadable for its language and content — and who was genuinely surprised to hear it. She had simply bleeped over all of that without noticing. His own version, from his software-company years, was declining the weekly *Game of Thrones* conversation: "I've seen porn and I've seen *Lord of the Rings*. I don't need to see the mashup."

▶ 1:46:35

Second, learn to be ravished with Jesus and give him the weight in your life. Not to the exclusion of everything else — Joe was careful with the people who come to him in tears about loving a husband or a family too much; that love is right. Above all else, not instead of all else. And if the thought of loving and obeying God strikes you as gin rummy with Grandma, then keep working at it, because you do not have it yet. "Whatever you glorify you will worship. Whatever you worship you will serve. And whatever you worship you will become like unto" — which, he pointed out, is the hope of 1 John 3:2: when we see him, we shall be like him. "It's been said that religious people find God useful, but Christians find him beautiful."

This is not talking yourself into something false. You cannot persuade yourself that okra beats filet mignon, and swapping one craving for another is the logic that gave us heroin as a cure for morphine — and then methadone to cure the heroin, ten times as addictive again. "We're really good at sciencing." It is the opposite: every good thing comes down from above, and everything beautiful is a shadow of the reality God made. Without him there are no good things at all. The most the tempter can do is offer God's good gifts in the wrong situation, or the wrong measure, or at a cost to our joy.

▶ 1:49:21

Third, repent. Here is where the title lands. The moment you catch the craving in flight and realize *I am wanting this more than I want to obey God* — that moment is itself the door of hope. It is the one place you can agree with God about what is true — "not just because it's a Sunday school answer," but because it is — and receive the grace that comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Achan could not say it. We can: my sin is grievous and I committed it with my eyes wide open, and as unworthy as I am there is one who took it on himself, who paid the debt, who ransomed me from a death penalty I fully deserve, who stood in my place in the valley of Achor and made it a door.

Are you in a valley of trouble?

▶ 1:50:38

Joe closed by widening the category. It is rarely gold and silver — though debt can feel like a prison and make you cut corners. It is more often needing validation. Needing an end to loneliness. Needing

control when everything is shaking like glassware in a cabinet during an earthquake, and you would do something God has told you not to do just to get your hands back on the wheel.

▶ 1:51:54

His assignment for the week was a psalm and a prayer.

> "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"
>
> PSALM 139:23–24 ↗

There is no rebuke in that psalm for having anxious thoughts — who could help it. Ask him to show you what you are gazing at and valuing above him. He will show you — where and when you forgot him in favor of other things. Then repent again, and he will woo you, and speak to you as a tender spouse rather than a harsh master. Joe's own prayer put it plainly: "The world is constantly parading these tawdry, cheap goods in front of us as a substitute. But only you have the really good things."

Then he opened the front. Prayer ministers were there for anyone God had already shown something to — "come pray, nail it down" — or for anyone who simply needed prayer; and if you did not know a minister, grab the Hope folks sitting around you. The message ended where it had been heading the whole time, not on the valley but on the door: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Genesis 3:14–15
- Jeremiah 17:9
- Joshua 7:19–21
- Joshua 6:18–19
- Joshua 7:5
- Joshua 7:11–12
- Exodus 20:3
- Matthew 6:21
- Joshua 7:22–23
- Joshua 7:24–26
- Hosea 2:14–15
- Hosea 2:16–17
- Hosea 2:13
- 1 John 3:2
- James 1:17
- Psalm 139:23–24

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Joe said he is still genuinely shocked by a broken world he already knows is broken. Where does that shock still catch you off guard?
2. Achan knew the penalty and took the robe anyway. What does that say about how knowledge and desire actually relate in your own life?
3. Walk the sequence — gaze, weight, covet, take — through something you have really wanted. Where could it have been interrupted, and what stopped you from interrupting it?
4. Joe said every private yes weakens the whole community. Who is downstream of your choices, and in what way?
5. Pray Psalm 139:23–24 this week and ask what you have been gazing at. What does God show you, and what changes because of it?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Joe Friedman is an ordained pastor at Hope Chapel who leads the church's Men's Ministry and is the contact named from the platform for the annual Men of Hope retreat. He told the congregation he has been part of Hope for almost ten years and was honored to be asked to preach. Along the way he mentioned years spent overseas, a stretch working at a software company, many years as a smoker, and a mother who raised six children and told the whole truth. “I'm an administrator. I can't help it.”

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao9PsuffXfs&t=4133s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.