

Day 4 – Feb. 2, 2023

When I was a freshman, I got into acting at our high school. In the spring, we had the 9th and 10th grade play, and it was about as good as it sounds. It was a learning experience and a bit of a crucible to see who really wanted to act and who was just there with friends. I was of the former sort, and found a home on stage for the rest of my high school and college career. That 9th and 10th grade play that year was “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson. It’s a story about a small town in New England where once each year they hold a lottery. The whole play revolves around this lottery, with growing tension and fear as we ask why everyone is so afraid to win the lottery. Turns out that the winner of the lottery gets stoned to death by the rest of the community, and life goes on for another year.

The story is eerily similar to today’s story of Achan and his sin. In the same way they whittled down the New England town to a single person, so God showed them the Tribe, then Clan, then Family, then Person who brought the guilt on the people, and in both cases, stoning was the result. This is interesting since the original command of God was that they should be set apart for destruction and burned, but apparently stoning was appropriate as well.

This seems awfully harsh to us today. They guy just gave in to his greed and took some valuables. Why should it cost the community 36 warriors in their first failed attempt to take Ai, and then Achan once he was found out. He even confessed – isn’t God supposed to forgive us when we confess? The bible does not honor our excuses for God – “Achan didn’t really confess” or “He was much more corrupt than the text explains” or “this would have led to much bigger problems for Israel had God not nipped it in the bud here and now”. God acted as God wished, and this is a theme we’ll see throughout this section of the history the bible shares. God acts through scoundrels, decimates entire cities, and then shows grace to people as well. God refuses to fit inside our rules that He is supposed to follow – mostly because He is God and is beyond our rules.

It takes faith to read these texts honestly – faith that God knows what He is doing; faith that God is not capricious or vindictive, but just and honest; faith that our relationship with God is somehow reflected in these stories of conquest and justice and punishment... and grace and love and protection and provision as well. Our God is incomprehensible at times, but our God reigns always.