

2 Samuel 24:1-25

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning is chapter 24 of 2 Samuel, which you'll find on page 332 of the Bible.

And he incited David against them, saying, Go and take a census of Israel and Judah. So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, Go throughout the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.

But Joab replied to the king, May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?

The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders. So they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel. After crossing the Jordan, they camped near Aruer, south of the town in the gorge, and then went through Gad and on to Jazer.

They went to Gilead and the region of Tatim-Hodshi, and on to Danjan and around towards Sidon. Then they went towards the fortress of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites.

[1 : 29] Finally, they went on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah. After they'd gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king. In Israel, there were about 800,000 able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah, 500,000.

David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant.

I have done a very foolish thing. Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad, the prophet, David's seer. Go and tell David, this is what the Lord says, I am giving you three options.

Choose one of them for me to carry out against you. So Gad went to David and said to him, Shall there come on you three years of famine in your land, or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you, or three days of plague in your land?

[2 : 37] Now then, think it over, and decide how I should answer the one who sent me. David said to Gad, I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great, but do not let me fall into human hands.

So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and 70,000 of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, Enough!

Withdraw your hand. The angel of the Lord was then at the threshing floor of Arunah the Jebusite. When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, I have sinned.

I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family. On that day, Gad went to David and said to him, Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Arunah the Jebusite.

So David went up as the Lord had commanded through Gad. When Arunah looked and saw the king and his officials coming towards him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.

[3 : 58] Arunah said, Why is my lord the king come to his servant? To buy your threshing floor, David answered, so that I can build an altar to the Lord, that the plague on the people may be stopped.

Arunah said to David, Let my lord the king take whatever he wishes and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood.

Your majesty, Arunah gives all this to the king. Arunah also said to him, May the Lord your God accept you. But the king replied to Arunah, No, I insist on paying for it.

I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the ox and paid fifty shekels of silver for them. David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.

Then the Lord answered his prayer on behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God indeed.

[5 : 01] Friends, good morning. Great to be with you. My name's Tim on the staff stand here at St Silas. Real privilege to be opening up God's word. Let us pray as we come. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks, and that you haven't left us by ourselves to guess at who you are or what you've done for us, but you've given us your word.

And we pray that as we come to Samuel 24 this morning, that you would speak to us and you would mould us and shape us to be your people. We pray that in Christ's name.

Amen. We're in the last sermon of our series, through 1 and 2 Samuel, looking at the life of David.

And it might be that there are a few questions that are ruminating in your mind as we get to the end of this series. The last time we were in the story, we were in the weeds of the David and Bathsheba incidents, having had a solid upward trajectory of our estimation of David in the narrative to that point, it comes crashing down.

And we realise that he's not going to be the king that Israel had been yearning for. And I think one of the questions that we're asking as we get to the end of 2 Samuel is, well, is there any difference between David and Saul?

[6 : 26] What does God make of David? Saul had his good moments. David certainly had his bad. Is there any difference? Is there anything that distinguishes them?

And perhaps we're asking, well, has God given up on David? If David was a plan that God had to rescue his people and now he's fallen short of that, has God sort of scrunched him up like paper and thrown him in the newspaper bin and coming up with a fresh attempt at saving his people?

And then we get to our passage from today, that the final words in these two books and there's all sorts of additional questions thrown into the mix.

I mean, this is a really perplexing chapter. Why does God give David three options for what judgment he's going to receive? We don't know.

As far as I can tell, that's the only time in the Bible that that happens. How did the angel or messenger carry the plague? We don't know. What did David see in verse 17 when he saw the angel?

[7 : 37] We don't know. There's so many things that we don't know. If you've ever been in a position of leading a Bible study, you'll be aware that there are many rabbit holes and tangents that people can go down when you look at a passage from the Bible.

And they're not all unhelpful. But the most important thing is that you work out what a passage is saying. And this chapter for us is trying to finish off the books of 1 and 2 Samuel with a final reflection on who David is, but also who God is and what it means for us.

And so that's the shape of our time today as we spend looking through 2 Samuel 24. The outline's in the handout you received and your way in. Keep your Bibles open.

We'll be flicking back and forth through the chapter as we go through this. First up, three verses that show us David. They are verses 10, verses 17 and 24.

But let me situate us in the story. David wants to take a census. We'll get to the motivation of that in a moment. But he doesn't know it when he's taking this census, but he's later going to recognise that this is a sinful thing to do.

[8 : 54] And there's this extensive parade of the army commanders all around the land of Israel to count the men who could serve in an army. And when they get back, David at that point realises that it's sin.

Now, it might be that this is the first attempt of Israel to build a standing army that wouldn't just defend their land against others coming in, but would actively attack other nations and subdue them.

So to go beyond the land that God had promised them, that would make them like the nations around them. They'd be trusting in their own power rather than what God had promised them.

It'd be pride, hubris, worldly thinking. And Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations rather than being war-hungry. So it might be that that's what's going on, that's why this is sin, but it's not actually clear why this is a sin.

For whatever reason, there's something in David's heart that God recognises is sinful. The focus of the passage isn't on the sin, but actually David's response to the sin.

[10 : 04] Verse 10, David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men. And he said to the Lord, I have sinned greatly in what I have done.

Now, Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing. I think conscience-stricken is a really helpful translation for this.

Literally, it's something like God, like David's heart smited him. But you know what a conscience is. It's that internal gut feel that you have for what is right and what is wrong.

And here, David's heart doesn't sit right when the army commanders come back with the report of who could serve in the army. And so he turns to prayer and he says, I have sinned greatly in what I've done.

The last time David says that phrase is the David and Bathsheba incident. In 2 Samuel 12. So what's the deal with David?

[11 : 17] He keeps sinning. Is he just the same as Saul? Well, notice what hasn't happened yet in this chapter. David hasn't been confronted in his sin by the prophet.

In 2 Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan came and led David to see his own sin. Took him a while to get there. But here, before there's any prompting from the prophet, David recognises his own sin.

It's a tender heart towards God that prompts him to repent. You know, a healthy conscience is a real gift. The most beautiful people who you have met in this world and in your life normally will be that way because they have a finely tuned conscience.

And they seek to do what is right not because it's going to be towards their advantage but because it is right. And the fact that we have a conscience, I think, is a decent argument for the existence of God.

It's proof that we are more than matter. But your conscience is like a muscle. And as it is exercised and as you listen to your conscience and as you obey it, it becomes healthier, it becomes stronger, more effective in your life.

[12 : 41] And as you ignore it, it's less effective in stopping you in your sin. And the fact that David's conscience kicks in here before he's confronted by the prophet is a suggestion that he is growing, that he is sensing God's word in his life.

Let's keep moving. The word of the Lord comes to God, the prophet or seer for David in this chapter and David isn't going to be let off easily. He's given three options.

Any of these three options will remove the ability of Israel to build an effective army in the short term. Option one, famine.

In the ancient world, when famine strikes and a nation's population becomes weaker, but first it becomes poorer. No crops to be grown means no crops to be bought and sold or to be harvested.

Unemployment rises, the cost of living increases, you become indebted to the nations around you who do have food. It means you're less able to sustain a big army. Option two, fleeing.

[13 : 54] Israel and Judah at this time were united and that meant that they were stronger, but the nations around them had their eyes on different parts of the land. Samaria, the capital of Israel, or the land east of the Jordan or the Tyre region.

The nations around were trying to, hoping to pick these off and losing land meant losing access to the residents of that land who could be in your army. Option three is infection.

There would be a plague that sweeps through the land and quickly kills off many. It's hard to build an army when the potential soldiers are dead.

And David chooses the third option. But it's interesting, he doesn't choose that based on that being the smallest punishment, but he chooses it based on the character of God.

Let us fall into the hands of the Lord for His mercy is great, but do not let me fall into human hands. And so the plague comes and it is a national disaster.

[15 : 02] When David sees the toll that it's having on his nation and he no doubt hears the reports that start to come in about the tens of thousands who are dying, he cries out to the Lord.

At the same time, God is holding the judgment up too. That tells us something of God's character, we'll get to that in a bit. But the second verse that shows us David's character is verse 17.

Verse 17. David takes responsibility.

It's like he moves to the front of the nation before God and says, I'm the next in line. This is my error. And responsibility is a very attractive trait.

There is something refreshing when a leader owns his or her own mistakes and takes responsibility for their actions. How often do we look at politicians, you know, weasel their way out of things through technicalities or through spin?

[16 : 23] It degrades trust in a leader when they do that. It makes you wonder what else that they're hiding. It's refreshing when someone says, I've done wrong. This is my fault.

Let the consequences fall on men. That's true politically. It's true in the workplace. It's true in a relationship. It's true at uni.

It's costly, but it's right. And David does that here. We'll keep moving. God tells David to build an altar, a place where sacrifices are made.

And he's directed to build this in a specific place. The Jebusites were the people who lived in Jerusalem before David conquered it. And so David purchases this specific plot of land that he is directed to.

It will become the plot of land that the temple is built on, one chronicles tells us. There's a bit of a negotiation But our third verse to think about for David shows his integrity.

[17 : 28] Verse 24. But the king replied to Aaron, no, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.

And so David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid 50 shekels of silver for them. David has the integrity to know that if he's going to make a sacrifice he has to make a sacrifice.

The cost has to come to him. It could have ended up being just sort of a public display of his own godliness and his own repentance but that's not what David's interested in.

He wants to pay the price. His motives are pure. Conscience, responsibility and integrity. three things that differentiate David from Saul in 1 and 2 Samuel.

So go out into the world this week, St Silas, praying that God would grow you as a person. Working hard to strengthen your conscience, take on responsibility and live with integrity.

[18 : 43] That's our sermon, isn't it? We done here? We call the band up, we've done a study of the text, we've applied it, we've said true things, we've seen why David is different to Saul, I even gave you three points.

Now, nothing we've seen so far is wrong. All of this is helpful and true of David but if we walk away from our character study of David and our lesson is learn from his mistakes and emulate his strengths.

Do be bold, do be courageous, do be a God-fearer, don't follow his sinful paths. You're left with what I might call the gospel according to Jordan Peterson.

You're familiar with Jordan Peterson? Some of us? He's a Canadian clinical psychologist and public figure. He's written books like 12 Rules for Life and imaginatively then 12 More Rules for Life.

Very helpful thinker, I'd recommend you, I think there's a lot of wisdom that he has for how to live in God's universe. But he's not a gospel preacher.

[20 : 03] And if we walk away from David with lessons to apply, we've essentially got a bunch of rules for life. It can't be all we walk away from his story with.

It can't be all we walk away from this chapter with. If this is the legacy that we're left with for David, we need to see more. And if we read carefully, we will.

Q.2 for this morning, two verses that show us God. They're verses 1 and 18. Verse 1, again, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel and he incited David against them saying, go and take a census of Israel and Judah.

To incite is to stir up or provoke something. That is bad. In 1 Chronicles, this same story is recounted and there we're told that Satan is the one who incites David, which raises some questions for us.

The answer is reasonably straightforward. God is sovereign over your actions and mine. He is sovereign over the devil and his schemes. Often when Satan thinks he is working, he's only accomplishing God's victory.

[21 : 19] Just ask Judas when he sends Jesus to the cross. David remains responsible for the sins that he will commit. He never doubts that, neither should we. But it's easy to miss something in verse 1.

before David sinned in this chapter, Israel has a problem. The Lord's anger burned against Israel before David sinned.

God's wrath is hovering over his people before David's done anything. Now, why is God angry? We don't know. We're not introduced to that.

It's just stated there as a reality. We don't need to know. Because what this ought to do for us is to remove the possibility that we engage with David's story like an armchair critic.

It's very easy to do this in two states. It's very easy to do this with the whole Bible, but we approach it as a literary critic. And we pick up our Bibles and we read it in our quiet times or in Bible study.

[22 : 32] We go, that bit's interesting, that bit's confusing, and then we work out the confusing bit and, okay, well, now we've done our Bible time. The most important thing that the Bible does is not give you rules for life.

It's not so that you can feel satisfied at having mastered it. But it's to declare to you reality as it is. And 2 Samuel 24 verse 1 says there's a reality that God is watching this world and when there is sin in this world he is angry at it.

That ought to make us stand up and take notice. Now there's two main ways I think that people respond, two unhelpful ways that people respond to the idea of God being angry at sinful people.

The first is to assume that they are the exception and the second is mockery. So as an Australian it's fitting for me to give an obligatory Crocodile Dundee reference to you.

There's a moment in the film, if you haven't seen it, don't waste time. There's a moment in the film where Mick Dundee, who is played by Paul Hogan, the proud Australian who lived most of his life in the United States, he's retelling a near-death experience, like the character is, right?

[24 : 07] And then he is asked if he was afraid of dying. And he goes, nah, I read the Bible once, you know, God and Jesus and all them apostles, they were all fishermen, just like me.

Yeah, straight to heaven from Mick Dundee. God and me, we'd be mates. Well, I wouldn't be so sure.

The phrase, the anger of the Lord burned in verse 1 is a very evocative image. Literally, it is the nose of the Lord burned.

The picture that you imagine when you hear that is God with, he's looking at the world with big eyes, furrowed brow, and flared nostrils.

Because sin is abhorrent and wicked. It has been ruining his good creation since the Garden of Eden. God doesn't make exceptions.

[25 : 12] It's so sad when creatures ignore the warnings of their creator. the second response I think that people have is mockery.

Sometimes as we're approaching dinner time in our house, Zoe, our three-year-old, will have a request for something that she would like to be included in dinner. It might be for sausages, or it might be for broccoli sometimes, funnily enough, or peas, or whatever else.

And then sometimes that's sort of included in the dinner that we all have. and then that gets put on a plate in front of Zoe at dinner time. And sometimes she'll say, I don't want it.

And in those moments, I look at my three-year-old daughter and I say, Zoe, do you know what you are? And she says, what? And I say, you are capricious.

And she says, no, I'm not a princess. I say, no, no, capricious. It means you change your mind really quickly without reason, eat your dinner.

[26 : 18] But capricious is the word that people use often to describe how they imagine God is when he's angry. Like he's a petulant toddler.

You never know what you're going to get with God. He's like angry, he loves me, he loves me not. He's angry, now he's not. I want to tell you that is exactly wrong. What you get from God is eternal consistency.

God's character does not change. The Lord don't change at all. His holiness doesn't change. Sin always causes this response from God.

You can know for eternity that when wickedness and God meet, only one of them will remain standing. Because God is opposed to sin, he's angry at it.

And we need that in our world. We need someone to stand for what is right, true and good. We need someone who can see clearly. And because God is uncompromising on sin, we have that in God.

[27 : 29] God is God. But it's not all you have in God. There's two stories in our chapter. Verses 1 to 17 are the story of the census and the response.

Verses 18 to 25 tell the story of David building an altar, stopping the plague, and paving the way for the temple where God will dwell with his people.

Who initiates the first story? What we were saying God does. Who initiates the second story? Verse 18. On that day, Gad, the prophet, sent to David by God, went up to David and said to him, go up and build an altar.

Who initiates the story about God being able to forgive and show mercy to his people? God does. You see, his holiness means he can't just not care about sin.

We don't want him to not care about sin. His mercy and love means he is always moving towards us. His desire is to be with us.

[28 : 45] And his character isn't a contradiction, he isn't capricious, this holy, loving God is always moving towards his people. You know the song that we sing sometimes where we say, your goodness is running after me.

It's a reference to Psalm 23 which says, surely your goodness will follow me all the days of my life. Because it's true. This holy, loving God is always moving towards you.

He desires to be with you. And the Bible is here to say, in this world of exams and in this world of promotions and firing and wars and breakups and whatever else, the most important thing is what God makes of you as he is moving towards you.

Will he come to you in wrath or will he come to you in love? Brings us to our final point. One verse that shows us.

The final verse of all in 1 and 2 Samuel. It's verse 25. David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.

[30 : 04] Then the Lord answered his prayer in behalf of the land and the plague on Israel was stopped. I actually had to Google what in behalf means.

I thought it might have been a typo in my Bible. Turns out to speak on behalf or to pray on behalf is to speak for someone but to do in behalf is in the interest of something that can't speak and the land can't speak so in behalf of this but that it is but that prompts the question why the land?

why the land? Well if you go back to verses 5 to 8 we get a lot of detail about where the army commanders went.

Jerusalem's in the south let's say it's positioned 6 o'clock they crossed the Jordan that's to the east from Jerusalem positioned 5 o'clock then they moved north in an anti-clockwise direction 3 o'clock 1 o'clock Tyre in verse 7 is on the coast of the Mediterranean sea 10 o'clock then south and east again back to Jerusalem and then verse 8 says they went through the entire land what's the point?

The whole land is complicit in this sin the sin has spread everywhere to every person who's been counted that's why verse 13 the options with God's judgment are focused on the land three years of famine in your land enemies coming from outside into your land or plague in your land everywhere that sin has spread judgment will follow but this chapter is a story where through the mercy of God and the intervention of his king the story finishes with good news for Israel they finish in a far better place at the end of the chapter than where it began with God's anger over them hovering if sin has spread to your life and like me it has then judgment will follow but because of the mercy of God and the intervention of his king your story will finish with good news if Jesus is your king throughout 1 and 2

[32 : 32] Samuel we have this consistent theme that we need a king like David perhaps we finish with that slightly modified we need a king like David and also a king who's not like David David's legacy is a faithful yet deeply flawed follower of God we need one who has his strengths but none of his weaknesses and we've seen through the series that we have that king in Jesus when sin had spread throughout this whole world and God's nostrils flared in anger you and I were implicated but he didn't remain distant he didn't cut us off he didn't throw us in the bin and start again this holy loving God moved towards us and he raised up his own son as king and Jesus stood to the front of us all and he said I'm the shepherd strike me and he was struck on a hill just outside the threshing floor of

Arunah the Old Testament sacrifice system was designed to point Israel towards the ultimate sacrifice sacrifice that would satisfy God's wrath that would turn his anger that would display the immensity of his love Hebrews 10 verse 5 says when Christ came into the world he said sacrifice an offering you did not desire but a body you prepared for me with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased and then he said here I am I have come to do your will my God and by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all brothers and sisters the final verse of 1 and 2

Samuel says the Lord answered his prayer on behalf of the land and the plague on Israel was stopped with the authority of the New Testament I declare to you the Lord answered Jesus prayer on behalf of his people and the plague of death was stopped for us in Jesus God sees us not as sinners who causes nostrils to flare but as holy his image bearers his treasured possession may that be what we walk away from 1 and 2 Samuel with let's pray heavenly father we thank you so much for Jesus because we sit here mindful of David's imperfections but our imperfections love and we know your character and in Christ we see your love your holy love love and we pray that as we walk away from this walk and we go on living our lives that we would live it knowing that in

Jesus you have given us the perfect king and that we would spend all of our days worshipping and following him amen amen to