

The Gospel according to Samuel

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[0 : 00] Tonight's passage is from 2 Samuel chapter 24 verses 10 to 25. And it's on page 332 of the church Bibles.

So 2 Samuel 24, starting at verse 10, page 332. 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 Sear. 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 on your land, or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you, or three days of plague in your land? 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 Arana 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, but 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 Arana the Jebusite.

[2 : 14] So David went up as the Lord had commanded through Gad. When Arana 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.

Arana said, Why has 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.

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

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

[3 : 20] 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. Thank you. Awesome.

Thanks, Sally. Thanks, Darren, for leading. And what a joy, great excitement. We've reached the end of Samuel. Ah, not quite.

Maybe, right. And it's been a bit of a thrilling ride, hasn't it? So let me pray for us as we start, and then we'll move into this fantastic passage this evening.

So Father, we thank you for this time. And we thank you for the great joy that we've had in looking at the book of 2 Samuel. And we pray, Lord, that you'd guide my words now.

And what's helpful, may that be remembered. And what's unhelpful, may that be forgotten. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Great. And I wonder if you might turn to your neighbor just quickly and just for a moment discuss what kind of leader you'd want.

[4 : 22] What kind of king you'd want. What would you look for them? And perhaps particularly relevant, we might be up for an election or something soon, maybe.

Right. So just take a moment and turn to your neighbor and chat that through. Moment there. I see some deep chats going on.

Right. Five, four, three. Was that too short? Right. Slightly. Right. Maybe you'd like to shout out. What would you like in a leader? Perhaps shout out.

Someone from this side, maybe. Not from Eton. Good one. Oh, that's half of Parliament. Someone from this side.

What quality would you look for in a leader, maybe? Be brave. Don't have to be. Integrity. Great. Right. Fantastic. Well, it might be that you want a powerful leader.

[5 : 23] You want a really strong figure. So you think of Genghis Khan or someone like that. Maybe you'd like someone who would advance the arts and that. So you think of James I.

And under his leadership, we had Shakespeare coming out and this great blooming of culture. And then maybe you might want a political liberation figure.

So I wonder if any of you clocked. Yesterday was Freedom Day in South Africa. The day when Nelson Mandela was released. However many years ago it was.

And so you'd want a political liberating figure like Nelson Mandela. And the question of leadership and of what kind of king you want is really the question that's been driving our journey through Samuel.

Now, that's perhaps a relevant question for us today. You see, Samuel has been a bit like the Lord of the Rings. What do I mean?

[6 : 25] Lord of the Rings, what's the point of the book? What happens right at the end of the books? Well, Aragorn gets crowned king of Gondor. And the whole book has been looking for this king that would bring priests to the land.

And so we're a bit like Frodo Baggins, as it were. We're going on this journey to destroy the ring. But we want to find out who is this king that's going to rescue us and bring us peace.

And Samuel starts off quite poorly in that regard. So it starts off with the people rejecting God as their king. And God says, well, he says to Samuel, this is going to be all right.

Because I am going to send a better king. A perfect king. The king that they need. And Samuel tells them that through this king, God is going to oppose the proud and exalt the humble.

That he is going to turn the greatest evil in history into the greatest good. That he is going to give them a promised king who will reign and save them forever and ever and ever.

[7 : 37] And you might remember the journey has been a bit of a roller coaster. So we think of before Samuel and the days of the judges and the judges. That's really bad. And it's down here. It's like down here. And then we come out and some judges are good.

And then it's bad. And then it's good. And then it's bad. And then we go, we enter into Samuel and it's, they don't want God as king. That's bad. And then, wait, they get Saul as king. And stuff starts getting better.

And then Saul turns out not to be a brilliant egg. And he goes down again. And then we get David. And things look spectacular. David's brilliant. He's zooming up.

He's zooming up. And we get that fantastic 2 Samuel 7 where God says, David, I'm going to build your house. I'm going to send you a king. And it's going to be amazing. And then what happens?

David falls off the cart. And they get worse. Absolutely worse. And it goes down and down and down. And we get to this chapter. And we think as though, well, it's really just continuing downhill.

[8 : 35] We think that 2 Samuels kind of reached the end and petered out somewhat. So what's going on here? But here's the trick. Samuel writes this book to encourage us.

Be encouraged. Were you encouraged by tonight's reading? I wonder if you were. And it's this chapter that looks so depressing, looks so down, looks like another failure in a category of failures, is really the high point in the book.

It's incredibly exciting. So rather than fizzling out, this chapter is like zooming off into the stratosphere. So I went on a plane journey the other day and we were about to land in this plane.

And as we came in, the pilot pulled up the gear stick and we zoomed off. And that's what's happening here. It's exhilarating. But it starts off really badly.

And so this is our first point there. A king who is proud. And we're looking at the part of Samuel that we didn't read this evening. So that's verses 1 to 9.

[9 : 43] So just join with me in looking down at verse 1. And I'll just read it for us. Again, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel.

And he incited David against them. Well, that's enormously awkward, isn't it, for a chapter that's meant to be terribly encouraging.

And it obviously causes a heap of questions for us. How can David be held accountable if God incited him? But the first thing to notice here is that David, as their king, represents all the people of God.

And the sin that David goes on to do in this chapter, that he sends the plagues that our reading opened up on, mirrors the sin that the people have committed and has caused God's anger to burn at them.

And secondly, whatever you might think about the question of God being in control and human responsibility, the author sees no problem in putting them side by side.

[10 : 50] And David himself acknowledges his guilt and responsibility. So look down at verse 10. He says, I've sinned greatly in what I have done.

I have done a foolish thing. You see, David believes that God is good and trustworthy, and that God is right to be angry with them because of what he has done.

And what is this great sin that he has done? Well, in verse 2, we read that David has ordered Joab to go throughout the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.

Now, it's not amazingly obvious what the issue is here. And it's perhaps that in David's pride and ambition, he wants to set up a standing army rather than a ragtag bunch of militia, that volunteer militia that comes together.

And what's clear is David is turning from trusting in God to trusting in himself, in his pride. And we know that it's sinful because look how Joab responds in verse 3.

[12 : 06] Look what Joab says. He says, May the Lord your God multiply your troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of the Lord of the King see it. But why does my Lord the King want to do such a thing?

Think of your most outrageous friend. So I think of this mate of mine, Jack. And I came home once, and Jack had a shovel in his hand, and he was trying to dig a hole through the dining room wall.

Standard. Another time I'd come home, and he had this habit of throwing TVs out our upstairs window onto the patio below. Standard. For Jack.

Now, imagine that friend coming up to you and suggesting, when you've suggested to do something, James, is that a great idea?

It's then at that point that you should know that there's something going on here, that you might have this wrong. And that is what it's like in having Joab coming to speak to David and warning him off and saying, Hang on.

[13 : 16] Are you sure you want to do this? But David insists, and David is the king. And so Joab, despite his better judgment, does what David says.

And David says this because he is proud. You see, sin is always a symptom of pride. We sin because we think we know better.

Think of a problem in your life, a situation. Think what being humble and humility. Think of the change and the difference that would make to that problem.

He said that. She said this. Let it go. Be humble and trust God. God hates sin. He will not let it go.

You don't need to hang on to it. But no sooner does Joab return than, what do we read? David is conscious stricken, and he humbles himself before God.

[14 : 18] And this is our second point. So we're moving into the passage that we read. And that is, we see in David a king who humbles himself, verses 10 to 15.

So look at what David says in verse 10. I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servants.

I have done a very foolish thing. And look how David reacts at the realization of what he's done. I have. I beg.

I have. You see, David doesn't try to justify himself here. What does he do? He puts up his hand, and he says, it was me. He confesses it.

And how different that is to how we feel about sin very often. You see, we like to think of ourselves as victims. But very, not very often do we like to think of ourselves as someone who has done it wrong against someone else.

[15 : 24] We might say something like, I'm sorry I plagiarized my essay. I, but, da-da-da, whatever the but is. Or we might say something like, I'm sorry I've got that speeding fine, but driving fast was exhilarating and really fun.

You see, we might be sorry about the consequences, but we're not sorry for our sin. But that's not the case with David. He puts up his hand, and he is sorry for a sin.

And then look at what he asks for. He says, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. You see, David doesn't ask to escape the consequences.

He doesn't ask to take away the bad feeling of my sin. But what he asks is that God would remove his guilty status before God as someone who has sinned and disobeyed God.

And so when we sin and we know about it, what is it that we're concerned about? Is it that we're more concerned about what people will think about me?

[16 : 39] What will people think if they found out I'm addicted to pornography? Or I'm bulimic? Or I'm failing my course because I do 60 hours of online gaming?

Or I'm anxious all the time. What will people think about that? Is that what we worry about? Or do we say, I wish I didn't feel so bad? Or I really don't want to go to jail for this.

How can I avoid that? Or I hope we can still be friends and that my sin hasn't ruined that relationship. I really want to still be friends with someone. And what we are concerned, but are we concerned about being guilty before God as someone who has sinned against and disobeyed a loving and good creator?

And the problem of sin is really God's anger at sin. So look at how God responds in verse 13. Shall there come on you three, possibly seven years, depending on what translation you take, of famine on the land?

Or three months of fleeing from the enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague on the land? Now then, you decide. And it's all those classic signs of God's judgment.

[18 : 02] Famine, sword, and pestilence. You choose. It's God's anger at sin that's the problem. And through this judgment, God is judging his people for their sin.

And what do we read? David's in deep distress over this decision that he has to make. So look at verse 14. I'm 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. And so the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated.

And so what we see is David throws himself on the Lord's mercy entirely in his humility. He turns back to God and he trusts God entirely.

He doesn't try and get out of this. He trusts the Lord. And what do we see? We see this plague in this passage going from Dan that's right in the north of Israel all the way down to Beersheba right in the south.

[19 : 06] And 70,000 are killed. And it's really a grim picture. The whole land is affected by this plague. It's shocking. Imagine that. The whole of Britain affected by a plague.

There's no hope of rescue or redemption or any kind of glimmer of hope in this passage. And we've seen this throughout Samuel, haven't we?

Of people being caught in sin and death. And this problem of sin coming up again and again and again. And maybe you know someone like that.

Someone whose life is caught in this pattern of sin and death. So my mom tells the story of one of her relatives who lived a great life.

Very respectable life. Had a great job. But then in his later life, his late 70s, his 80s, he got addicted to opioids. And his life just went totally downhill.

[20 : 04] He got caught in this pattern of sin and death. And that's what sin does. It captures us. It's like the Hotel California. We can enter in, but we can never leave.

Well, if it weren't for God. And up until this point in Israel's history, it has been a cycle of sin and death.

And so we think of the judges, and we think of Saul, and we think of David. And what Samuel wants us to understand in seeing that, in painting that picture of that pattern, is that the real enemies in our lives are not what political leader we have, what cultural leader we have, what financial enemies we have.

The real enemies in our life are sin and death. These are the enemies that we need to be saved from. And so the king that we need is someone who will conquer these enemies of sin and death and allow us to live in God's presence.

Now, up until this point in this chapter, this has been incredibly depressing. It's not great, but it turns at this point. So that's our third point.

[21 : 21] A king who prepares the way for a greater rescue. Verses 16 to 25. And it really is amazing. So look down at verse 16. 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! And the angel stops the judgment where? At the floor, above the threshing floor of Arunah the Jebusite.

And Samuel here, did you notice? I wonder if you picked up on this. He slows down the action at this point. It's been quite quick up until this point. Because this is the high point in David's reign.

I wonder if you clocked that. This is really the pinnacle of David's reign. This is the thing that David will get remembered for, what Samuel goes on to describe here. And this is where Samuel wants our hearts to land.

What do I mean? You might be wondering that. Listen to how the psalmist describes Arunah the Jebusite's thresh. And what it represents.

[22 : 32] How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty. My soul yearns. It even faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh, they cry out for the living God. You see, what Samuel is describing here is how David is buying the piece of ground on which King Solomon, David's son, will build God's temple in Jerusalem, where God will live with his people, and where sacrifices and offerings would be made to deal with the problem of sin, so that the people could live with God.

And what do we read in verse 25? We read of the very first sacrifice made on the site. So 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. And that's the picture that Samuel leaves us with, of God's king making a sacrifice for the people's sins and his own sins.

And to Samuel's original readers and heroes, this would have been an incredibly glorious picture. This would have been like Christmas and Easter rolled into one.

[23 : 56] But here's the thing. It gets better. And that's our fourth point, our final point. A king who points to God's true king forever. Look at verse 17.

Look what he says there. So when David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, David says, I have sinned. The shepherd have done wrong.

These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and on my family. You see, David acknowledges that he has sinned, that he was meant to guard and protect God's people from sin.

He was meant to be the good shepherd. And shepherds in those days, they're not like those cuddly figures that we think of, that wear pastel or something like that. They were, they fought bears.

They fought wolves. They fought lions to protect their sheep. They would often die protecting their sheep. And David prays that he might bear the punishment for the sins of the people in the people's place as the good shepherd.

[25 : 06] He prays that he might die to protect them. You see, David wants to be that perfect king that would save God's people perfectly and defeat sin and death.

But David can't save God's people because he's part of the problem. So what do I mean? Imagine a little while back, myself, 13-year-olds.

There I am in my classroom at school. Quite a raucous classroom. Our form teacher is Miss Boshoff. She was the South African shot put champion. Quite intimidating. Intimidating.

And the class has gone ballistic one day. We're throwing paper everywhere, hanging kids out the windows, and Miss Boshoff walks in. Shudder. And she says, Right, that's it.

Detention for everyone. Can you imagine the foolishness of me at that point having half dangled a kid out the window saying, It's all right, Miss Boshoff.

[26 : 06] I'll take the detention for all the rest of the class. You can let them go. No. I have to sit detention for my own mistakes.

I can't carry their mistakes when I still have mistakes of my own. You see, David needs his own sins forgiven. David needs a king who will save him, who will defeat sin and death.

And Samuel, speaking at this point, he's speaking prophetically. You see, he's looking forward a thousand years to the good shepherd who will die for the sins of his people.

He is looking forward to God's promised king forever who would fully and finally defeat the enemies of sin and death. You see, the temple and the sacrifices there could never defeat the enemies of sin and death.

Here's how the letter of the Hebrews, the author of it, puts it in 10 verse 4. He says, It's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

[27 : 17] You see, when David made his burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on that day, all those years ago, he didn't think that these will take away my guilt and make me right with God.

He didn't say to himself, If I do this thing, then I will be right and the plague and the punishment will stop. It's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

No, what he was indicating was that he was trusting in God alone to take away his sins. He was trusting that God would send a king forever who would make him right before God and take away his guilt.

See, the author of the Hebrews goes on and he says, We have been made holy, that is, right before God, having our guilt removed and the plague of God's wrath and anger removed through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

You see, Jesus is the true and better temple. He did what the temple in Jerusalem could never do. You see, Jesus is God's promised king that Samuel says we need, who left his throne in heaven and humbled himself to death and God exalted him.

[28 : 41] And when Jesus was crucified, it was the act of the greatest evil and wickedness ever committed. The one true, perfectly innocent man in history was crucified.

But God turned it into the greatest good. And you see, Jesus was the king who did die for his sheep. So in John's gospel, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, speaking of his crucifixion. And when Jesus died on the cross, he died as a king and shepherd for his people and for his sheep to take away their sin and David's and yours and mine.

Our guilt before God for where we have ignored God and turned away from him. And when the angel stopped over Arunah, the Jebusite's threshing floor, it was not there that God had changed his mind.

God never changes his mind. But it was that God was looking forward to a day when Jesus would suffer and die for the sins of God's people.

[29 : 55] When the angel of death would pour out God's anger at sin on God's son on the cross. And so that God's people would go free without fear and judgment.

Let me close and pray for us. So Father, we thank you for this glorious chapter. Father, we thank you how it points to Jesus so clearly.

We pray that we would respond appropriately trusting in your son more and more. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.