

2nd Samuel Ch 24

My little girl Elizabeth who's now 3 ½ does a pretty good job when it comes to counting, if she's focused she can even get as high as 12, or perhaps 15. And the other day her and bubb was playing hide and seek there in the house, the problem was counting to 50, and so it was the generally confused counting procedure, "1,2,3,4,9,7,12,6,15,2,3...50 ready or not here I come!" And the idea there is that a certain # brings about a certain consequence, and that is, when I reach the designated #, I'm coming to get you!

Well as we turn our attention to 2nd Samuel ch 24 we come to another event in David's life whereby counting brings a disastrous consequence into his life, and the nation of Israel. This last Ch isn't the end of David's life, but it is an event that took place during the latter portion of his life and though I'm not glad that David sinned in these ways, I'm encouraged to know that at the end of his life, he was still struggling with that sin nature of his. Because I still struggle with that sin nature of mine, and I have a suspicion that you do to. And the point here is that we're going to until the day this mortal puts on immortality, and this corruptible puts on incorruption and that's the day when we see the Lord face to face. We noted several weeks ago when David was on the battlefield during his old age (just before they retired him from the military) how that David was still fighting giants in his old age, and we realize that in that scenario those were struggles from the outside pressing in. But in the ch that's before us we see him succumbing to struggles that are pressing on him from with in, it's that battle between the flesh and the Spirit, and even in his old age, this man after God's own heart had not arrived at a godly state of sinless perfection. But he also serves as an example to us of how if we'll repent, God will restore. Paul the apostle said it like this, "*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" Phil 3:12-14 And that could more or less encapsulate David's life, he realized he hadn't attained, wasn't perfected, but when cognizant or confronted with sin, he'd repent and press on, because God had a plan for his life. And God has a plan for your life as well, so understand that we're all going to make mistakes, there's never going to be a day, even in your old age whereby you've attained, now hopefully you'll have matured considerably, but you won't be perfect. But the point is when you're aware of sin in your life, repent and press on, don't be haunted by it, or condemned because of it, forget those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead. Well we read here in vs 1.

Vs1

Now if you're reading the NKJV along with me you see here where the word, "He" is capitalized. And if this were the only account of this particular incident in scripture we'd pretty much have no other way by which *to* see it. But we realize as we've stated so many times in the past that the Hebrew language isn't like English in that there's no punctuation, no upper or lower case letters and so on and so forth. Therefore it's left up to the translators to determine the way a given sentence is punctuated, and though they do their best, I don't believe any translation is perfect, they all have their strengths and they all have their weaknesses. Now I believe that KJV, and the NKJV are translated from a better manuscript tradition than say the NIV, or the American Standard, but if someone wants to know which version of the bible is the best one, the fact is, that the best version is the version you'll read. Because it doesn't matter, if every "I" is dotted and every "T" is crossed if you never read it.

Now all that to say I believe it was a mistake to capitalize this word "He" here in vs 1, because the assumption that's drawn from that is that the Lord more or less pushed David into a sinful situation and then punished him for sinning. But the bible says, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*" James 1:13

And so to see this as God being the source of David's sin would seem to fly in the face of that. Now we know that God would have to allow the temptation, but He Himself isn't going to be the source of that temptation. We know from vs 1 that the Lord's anger was aroused against Israel, and because of that we know that the door was opened whereby David could be tempted to number the people, but the subtle suggestion that he succumbed to wasn't whispered by God. The parallel passage to this in 1st Chronicles makes it clear, "*Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.*" 1 Chron 21:1

So then the question comes up, what's the big deal about #ing the people anyway? Well there would've been no big deal had the Lord given the instruction to and it would've been done in compliance Ex 30 beginning there in vs 11. But this census had nothing to do with receiving the temple tax, it was in order to see how big and powerful his military had become. Which speaks to us on a couple of levels, #1 it shows us that David was becoming proud at this point seeking to establish what exactly was the power of *his* might, rather than trusting in the Lord for his security. But then 2^{ndly} the fact is that it wasn't *his* military, or his nation to begin with, Israel belonged to the Lord, and when I begin to count it speaks of ownership. We don't count things that don't belong to us, how many of us count up the money that's in our friend's bank account? We don't do that, it's not our money we have no business counting it, besides if you counted mine, you'd be sorely disappointed because there's really nothing there to count. So in large part the issue here is the motive of the heart, if God commanded the counting, then there would've been no issue, but because David took the initiative from a position of pride there was a problem. He was assuming ownership of the accomplishments that *God* had granted him throughout his reign and he was allowing it to puff him up in pride. So then is it wrong to count the people that come to your church? I think it's an issue of motive.

In Matt's gospel Jesus told a parable. He said, "*What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.*" Matt 18:12-13 Question, how would he know there's was 100 to begin with if there was never a count? And I'll guarantee you that to look at a crowd of 99 and a crowd of 100, you'll never know the difference from the eye's perspective, there needs to be a continual count happening to notice the 1 that missing. So it seems to me that if the motive is proper care and accountability for the sheep of *His* hand, and the desire is to do your best tending to God's kingdom, then there's no issue. If the count takes place to stroke your flesh and see how big *your* kingdom has been built, then we have a major problem, and this was David's problem, he was seeking the statistics of *his* kingdom, not caring or tending to the sheep of *God's* kingdom.

Vs2-4

The book of Proverbs tell us, "*Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*" Prov 11:14. And we read here that both Joab and the various captains of the army counseled David against this military census. And as you survey the life of Joab you basically conclude that though he was fiercely loyal to David, he wasn't a man of much spiritual conviction as it regards to godliness, but here even Joab throws out a wind of caution for David.

And he tells David, "Look, I hope that the nation increases by 100 times and your eyes get to see it, but why do you desire this thing?" What thing? The increase of the nation, the increase of the kingdom, now that should've been a heart check for David, as it should be for the rest of us as well, whatever it is that's before us, whatever it is that we desire, *why* do we desire this thing, whatever it may be? And perhaps David was rationalizing that he was preparing to hand the kingdom to his son, and he wanted to make sure that there was enough military might to keep them secure, or to defend them from neighboring nations that may seek to take advantage of the lack of Solomon's military prowess. But regardless of his rationale what should've done was trust in the Lord to be their shield and their strength, and that even as God had taken care of him, so He'd take care of his son as well, but he's trusting in #'s, not in the Lord. And it's like we entrust ourselves to the Lord, but sometimes it's difficult to relinquish our children into His trust. We want to take care of *them* ourselves, and surely we're responsible to raise them in a godly manner, but we need to come to that place in our hearts where we trust that no matter what happens to us, God's going to take care of our kids. Well, be that as it may, David would hear of nothing else other than to carry out this mission, and so he sent Joab and the captains of the army to take a military census of the people.

Vs5-9

Now when you read there in 1st Chronicles you realize that the men of Levi and the men of Benjamin, Joab didn't count, perhaps because he knew he was on a sinful mission #1, but then also there may've been some pockets of resistance there in Benjamin because David was of the tribe of Judah, and Saul was from Benjamin. But for whatever the cause, the incomplete total after the nearly 10-month mission was 1.3 million men who were prepared to take the sword. And out of that some somehow estimate that the total population of Israel at that time would've been 5-6 million people, but David had 10 months to repent of this, (what we might call "carefully calculated sin,") he could've called off the whole thing at anytime, but he didn't. But now that the report comes in, David's heart is smitten with conviction, and isn't that the way it so often is with sin, it seems so worth it in the moment, but as soon and the sin is fully birthed we're smitten with conviction, if we'd have only ceased while there was time, or turned around, or changed the channel, or called off the deal, or clicked off that page, or whatever, but it's so often only after the sin, that we're overcome with conviction rather than listening to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit or those around us in advance. Look at vs 10

Vs10

And again this is what made David such a great man of God, did he make mistakes? You bet, did he act foolishly, admittedly by his own confession he did that, but David never sought to take advantage of the grace of God. And when convicted of sin in his life he never made excuses, never sought to justify himself, he confessed it, sought the Lord *through* it, and repented *of* it. And let me tell you that type of humility puts you on God's side, there's no "Yeah buts" in vs 10, there's not seeking to place the blame on anyone else, he said, "God I'm a fool, and I've sinned greatly, and now I pray that you'd take away the iniquity of Your servant." The bible says, "*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*" 1 Peter 5:5. And this type of genuine humility as portrayed in David will be honored by the Lord every time. Don't make excuses for your sin, don't blame anyone else for *your* choice, take responsibility for your actions before the Lord, and God will honor your heart of repentance.

It's interesting when David sinned with Bathsheba he said, "I have sinned," but when he sinned in the numbering of the people he said, "I have sinned *greatly*." David was able to see the enormity of what he'd done here, yeah his sin with Bathsheba would cost men their lives, but not of this magnitude, before it's all said and done 70,000 people will die as the result of David's "carefully calculated" sin here. The bible is clear that the wages of sin is death, be careful giving way to a little compromise that seems to benefit you today, because it just might bring a whirlwind of disaster with it tomorrow.

Vs11-13

Now this reminds us a little bit of when Nathan came to David after he'd sinned with Bathsheba, but as to where Nathan's visit was to *prompt* David's repentance, Gad's visit was the *result* of David's repentance.

But this situation here kind of blows my mind, I can't think of another place in scripture where God says, "Pick your punishment, I'm giving you 3 options." Perhaps as a parent you've said to your child, "Do you want 8 swats, 3 days grounding, or a week with no electronic gaming privileges?" Or perhaps I'm the only one who's done something of that nature, but it's sorta that kinda deal, it kind of reminds us of the old game show, "Let's make a deal." Behind curtain #1, 7 years of famine, behind curtain #2, 3 months fleeing from your enemies, and behind curtain #3, a 3-day plague, "*Now think it through, and what will be your choice?*"

And as far as I can consider, perhaps God's trying to teach David just that, that our choices impact the lives of others, and we need to be careful regarding the decisions we make in life. It's so easy for us to take that mentality of, "Well, it doesn't really matter what I decide, or what I do, God's will, will be done." And in the big picture that's true, God will advance His kingdom, and the gates of hell won't prevail, but in the smaller picture it's equally as true that God has ascribed great authority to our individual choices as well, and what we decide in a given situation can carry with it great impact in our own lives, and in the lives of possibly thousands as well. Of course the greatest choice we can make is to surrender our lives to Jesus Christ but we need to understand that for every action we decide on, there's going to be a reaction, the bible calls it sowing and reaping, and God will not be mocked. Now God will pardon that is true, but He won't pamper, if we'll confess, if we'll repent, God will pardon our sin, but He won't excuse our sin, nor will He pamper us. Whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and here we see the disciplining hand of the Lord upon David's life.

Can you imagine having to make a choice like this, and again I believe God is impressing upon David, the impact our choices can have upon the lives of other people and how we need to weigh our choices in life very carefully before we act upon them.

Vs14

You might underline the last portion of this vs, "Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man." Choice #1, 7 years of famine, this was the longest time period ascribed to these choices, and during that time Israel would have to rely on neighboring nations to provide for them, they'd have to beef up their foreign nations policies. And surely during that time people would die, but not David, the king, and even the wealthy of the nation are able to sort of circumvent those kinds of things by means of their resources. Choice #2, Fleeing 3 months before their enemies, not overwhelmed in totality but being routed nonetheless. But again, it would be mostly soldiers who would receive the brunt of this choice, and some families, but David had retired from the military at this point so he wouldn't be impacted by this one either.

But choice #3 knew no bounds; it could strike the simplest shack in Israel as well as the palace, the wealthy and resourceful as well as the poor. The other 2 involved the hands of man, but #3 was entirely of the Lord, and that ultimately was what David thrust himself into, he knew that the Lord was merciful and full of compassion, and he'd rather cast himself into the hand of the Lord, than include in this thing that hand of man. Wise choice, by the way in mythology, "The gods" are generally seen as cruel, and toying with man in tyranny, like it's their amusement, but the bible shows us that the 1 true living God is quite different. Slow to anger, rich in mercy, looks for opportunity to forgive, and David knew that about God, and so he chooses curtain #3, a plague from the hand of the Lord. And let me just say that the safest place any of us can be, be it for rebuke or blessing, is in God's hands. So he just abandons himself into the hands of God.

Vs15-16

So David banked on God's mercies, and it paid off, God called the angel off there at Jerusalem there near the threshing floor of Araunah. But before the plague was over, within 3 days 70,000 people died, think about that. The most recent national tragedy we've had was a few years ago on 9/11, and not to in anyway minimize that but that tragedy was limited to a few thousand people or less. And look at the global attention that it's received; here Israel lost 70,000. And if it's true that approximately 5 million was the overall population that would be equivalent to the U.S. losing somewhere to the tune of 3.1 million people in 3 days. So what's happening here is radical. Something else you might find interesting is that 2nd Chronicles tells us that the threshing of Araunah was on Mt Moriah, the same hill where Ab offered Isaac, the same set of hills where Jesus would die on the cross, and so in one respect we might say without stretching the text too far that when this angel came to the place of the cross, God's judgment was satisfied.

Vs17

And so we notice the shepherd's heart that's in David, willing to lay down his life in the place of the sheep, and in the likeness of Christ he steps up and says if there's a price to pay, Lord let me pay it. Now obviously David had sinned here and so there's that element to factor into the equation, and I'm not able to read into the scriptures that which isn't there, but we also need to remember the way this ch started out, the anger of the Lord was aroused, (not against David) against Israel. And so the door was opened and David fell into a trap that brought on this penalty, but David says, "Lord let me take the hit, I'm willing to lose my life if it might spare your people's lives."

Vs18-24

Now in the parallel passage of 1 Chronicles 21 we read where David said that he would surely buy the threshing floor for the "full" price. He wasn't going to skimp on the Lord, how often we want to give to the Lord that which costs us nothing, and we don't really give sacrificially to the Lord. But David said he wouldn't do that, how often we're willing to pay the price of sin, but we want sanctification on the cheap, we don't want to really sacrifice anything if that's the price for sanctification.

We want to watch whatever movie or sitcom we feel the need, or do whatever the moment may offer, and we try to get by with out paying a price, but what this is teaching us is that there's a price to be paid for sanctification. Salvation is free, the Lord paid that price, but sanctification will cost you, David had the chance to get this stuff for free, and no one would've known the difference, but if it was free to David, and then David gave it to the Lord, it wouldn't have been David's gift at all, it would've been Araunah's. David understood the principal of sacrifice, and if it cost him nothing, then it wasn't going to be a sacrifice, just a mere set of logistics, or legal motions to maintain peace and a clean conscience, but it wouldn't have been from his heart.

And what I'm trying to say is that David refused to do the most minimal thing he could to please God. This is convicting stuff, because so often what we look for is the cheapest, most minimal way to please God. We know that we should spend time with the Lord in prayer, and in His Word on a daily basis, and so what does our carnal heart begin to gravitate towards? What's the minimum amount of time that I can spend with God to make Him happy? "Alright God let me know, what's it going to take to make You happy? 3-5 Minutes in prayer, and a chapter each day? Can I get by with the 10 minutes in the car on my way to work? C'mon just tell me the minimum I need to do, and I'll do it." That's a heart looking for the cheapest way possible please God. And it shows up in other places to, we know we need to serve practically in some way, and so, "God what's the minimum amount of self sacrifice that you require to bless someone else, and fine I'll do it." And at the risk of stepping on some toes, it shows up often in our giving as well. "Ok Lord, I know that I should give to You, is that whole 10% thing like a requirement?" And then we start reasoning, "Is it net or is it gross?" And essentially we're asking for the minimum requirement, rather than giving sacrificially and liberally to the Lord. But we need to get in touch with the fact that the God we serve is a giving God, what good thing do you have but that He hasn't given it to you? He was willing to sacrifice His Son that He might give you eternal life, now why do you, or I want to hold out, and not give sacrificially to Him?

But understand this principal, you *will* sacrifice for your god. Whatever you're making sacrifices for in your life, don't be deceived, that's your god. So often we'll make great sacrifices for our comfort, we'll buy *this* to secure our comfort, avoid *that* to maintain our comfort, and if that's the place you're making your most significant sacrifices, what can I say, comfort is your god. Maybe you sacrifice tremendously for your career, or for your family, or any of several points of interest, then lets be clear that is your god. But if you don't make sacrifices, or if you don't sacrifice anything for the Lord, then lets be honest, He's not your God. Because whatever is your god, you will sacrifice unto that god. So then what's your reasonable service? "...*that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God,*" Rom 12:1

But here's the beautiful promise of God's Word, you can't give to Him without Him giving back to you mashed down, pressed together, and overflowing. So essentially it does cost you nothing, that's the irony of it all. Now initially it will, that sets the motive of your heart, but God will bless you all the more in return. And finally

Vs25

What's the closing application here? We notice 2 things, we notice that the Lord heeded David's prayers, but what preceded that response? David's obedience to God's word, #1 David obeyed, and #2 God heeded his prayer, what's the point, disobedience to God's Word will hinder our prayers. David built the altar as God's Word instructed, he offered burnt offerings, or sin offerings and peace offerings as he was told, and the Lord heeded his prayers. It kinda takes back to where we were Sunday morning, if you *know* God's Word, blessed are you if you *do* God's Word.