

4. Men's pride and God's grace

May 24, 2012

Eleven years ago, I went to my first Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors' Conference in Murrieta, CA. I was a brand new pastor of a small Calvary Chapel to others at the conference.

On the registration day, as I was walking across the campus, I saw several pastors sitting at the benches around the lake and under the tree shades, reading the Bible, praying, meditating, and talking with one another. I thought I saw halos around their heads. I thought everyone else was holy, but I was the only scum of the earth who somehow was granted to be into this little heaven on earth.

After the lunch we all piled into the Multi-Purpose Room where we had the teaching sessions. I was looking forward to hearing profound sermons from these great Calvary Chapel Godfathers. And I did. And I also started to see their human heads instead of the halos that I thought I was seeing.

Last few years, I was getting tired of the spiritual facades that I saw from the so-called Calvary Chapel Godfathers; I was getting tired of the same old line-up of mega church speakers; I was getting tired of bragging sessions of how big their churches are. And I was getting tired of cliques of pastors according to the size of their churches, especially in the dining hall.

Somehow the famous and explosive Calvary Chapel movement that happened by the power of the Spirit of the Living God in the early 1970s turned into a numbering game. It became the only way to measure the success of the individual church, not by the depth of their congregation's spiritual condition.

Somehow the pastors of Calvary Chapels were unofficially taught to think that if your church doesn't have thousands of people in your congregation and multi-million dollar budget, you are a failure.

Somehow we learned to adopt the theology of successful church – "counting nose and nickels" as norm. Do the Calvary Chapel Godfathers teach against that? Yes, thousand times yes. As a matter of fact, they teach with the authority of the Holy Spirit. Do they live by it? Absolutely NOT!!! I came to the point where I got sick of it. So I stopped going to the Senior Pastors' Conference. It saves the church money and saves me from being aggravated.

Tonight we are going to see king David doing a number game with pride in his heart. After he repented, the Lord extended His grace to him and the entire human race. I believe that we have an incredible lesson that we must learn from this Book.

A. A PROUD KING

1 Chronicles 21:1-3 Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. 2 So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it." 3 And Joab answered, "May the Lord make His people a hundred times more than they are. But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then does my lord require this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?"

The Lord commanded Moses to count the number of Israel's population.

Exodus 30:12 When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them.

The principle of Exodus 30:12 speaks to God's ownership of His people. Israel didn't belong to David; rather to God. It was up to the Lord to command a counting, and if David counted he should only do it at God's command and receiving ransom money to "atone" for the counting.

Everything depends on the motive. When it is born of pride, it is the opening of a grave risk. If the motive is for service, it is from God; but if the motive is for individual pride, it is from satan.

Then, someone might object that 2 Samuel 24:1 says otherwise.

2 Samuel 24:1 Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."

There is a simple explanation for this. Obviously the Israeli people did something wrong again to the Lord. The Lord was going to punish them. At the same time, David was planning to do a census to find out how many soldiers he had in his kingdom so that he could feel good about it at the end of his life. So the Lord allowed satan to tempt David to number his people.

Sometimes when God tries to stop us from doing something that is a big mistake, and He puts up various roadblocks, and continually warns us. But if we just won't listen, He goes ahead and lets us make the mistake. It isn't His will, but He allows us to sin since we have free will.

Pride can be especially dangerous among the people of God. Once a man came to John Bunyan, the author of a profound Christian classic "the Pilgrim's Progress", after a sermon and told him what a fine sermon he preached. "You're too late," Bunyan answered. "The devil already told me that before I stepped down from the pulpit."

Satan can entice the praying sister to be proud of her ability to pray, the growing brother to be proud of his spiritual growth, and even the humble brother to be proud of his humility.

B. PICK YOUR OWN PUNISHMENT

1 Chronicles 21:7-13 And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel. 8 So David said to God, "I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly." 9 And the Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, 10 "Go and tell David, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you.'"" 11 So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Choose for yourself, 12 either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or else for three days the sword of the Lord--the plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now consider what answer I should take back to Him who sent me." 13 And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

According to 2 Samuel 24:8, the census took over nine months. David had ample time to repent, but he didn't.

The spirit of vainglory in numbers can easily take over people's minds so that they trust in numbers and forget God whether it is in wealth or popularity, or size of his or her organization.

When we think about David's sin, we immediately think about his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the cover-ups that ended in the murder of her husband Uriah. That was a sin of the flesh, a yielding to lust. But the census was a sin of the spirit, a willful act of rebellion against God which was purely motivated by pride. I am sure that you've noticed that pride is the number one on the list of the sins that God hates.

Proverbs 6:16-17 These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood,

Both Scripture and man's law distinguish between sudden sins of passion and willful, premeditated crimes. This census was the case in point.

Since David's disobedience was a sin of the will, a deliberated choice on his part, so God allowed him to make another choice and choose his own punishment. The three choices were the punishments that God already named them if Israel rebels against the Lord – famine, military defeat, and plague according to Deuteronomy chapter 28. David knew that God is far more merciful and gracious than his enemies ever would be.

C. SIN ALWAYS AFFECTS OTHERS

1 Chronicles 21:14-17 So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell. 15 And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the Lord looked and relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who was destroying, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 16 Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces. 17 And David said to God, "Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O Lord my God, be against me and my father's house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued."

Even though these 70,000 dead people were not innocent as it is mentioned in 2 Samuel 24, but as their king, David saw the result of his own sin and how it affected his people. I am sure that many of these dead people had families. Now their death brought out sorrow upon sorrow to their families.

Some commentators say that these 70,000 people were the ones who followed Absalom in his rebellion and didn't want David as their king. It might be, but we don't see it anywhere in the text.

V15 shows us the word 'relent'. The Hebrew word is 'nacham'. Its definition is "to be sorry, be moved to pity, have compassion". Some translation render as "repent". I strongly believe that it is a very poor translation. How can our sinless perfect God repent from what? Describing the infinite God's characters, attributes, and actions in finite human's words is not easy or sometimes just plain impossible.

D. MY SACRIFICE, NOT YOURS

1 Chronicles 21:18-27 Therefore, the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 19 So David went up at the word of Gad, which he had spoken in the name of the Lord. 20 Now Ornan turned and saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him hid themselves, but Ornan continued threshing wheat. 21 Then David came to Ornan, and Ornan looked and saw David. And he went out from the threshing floor, and bowed before David with his face to the ground. 22 Then David said to Ornan, "Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar on it to the Lord. You shall grant it to me at the full price, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." 23 And Ornan said to David, "Take it to yourself, and let my lord the king do what is good in his eyes. Look, I also give you the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing implements for wood, and the wheat for the grain offering; I give it all." 24 Then King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing." 25 So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place. 26 And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering. 27 So the Lord commanded the angel, and he returned his sword to its sheath.

As king, David could have taken the property or even borrowed it, but he insisted on purchasing it. David knew the high cost of sinning and he refused to give the Lord something that had cost him nothing. For fifty shekels of silver he purchased the oxen for sacrifices and the wooden yokes for fuel, and for six hundred shekels of gold, he purchased the entire threshing floor.

Had Ornan's noble offer been accepted, it would have been Ornan's sacrifice, not David's; nor would it have answered properly the displeasure of the Lord. Atonement could only be made through the blood of an approved substitute. Burnt offerings were to atone for sin; peace offerings were to enjoy fellowship with God.

The sending of fire from heaven answered a question that had burned in the heart of David for a long time. For many years, he had wondered where God wanted the temple to be built, and he sought for that place, as shown in Psalm 132:1-5:

Psalm 132:1-5 Lord, remember David And all his afflictions; 2 How he swore to the Lord, And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: 3 "Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed; 4 I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids, 5 Until I find a place for the Lord, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us that the threshing floor of Ornan was on Mount Moriah; now the same hill becomes the place for the Temple of God; the same hill where Abraham offered Isaac according to Genesis 22:2 about a thousand years ago, and the same set of hills where Jesus died on the cross about a thousand years later.

E. THE NEW PLACE OF THE ATONING SACRIFICE

1 Chronicles 21:28-30 At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there. 29 For the tabernacle of the Lord and the altar of the burnt offering, which Moses had made in the wilderness, were at that time at the high place in

Gibeon. 30 But David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord.

Until now the Tabernacle was in Gibeon and no sacrifice was allowed to be made anywhere else except at the Tabernacle. For the first time, the Lord allowed a sacrifice was to be made at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Out of the two greatest sins of David, the Lord brought out two wonderful things. First, He allowed Bathsheba to give birth to Solomon and God chose him to succeed David on the throne. Through David's lineage, the Messiah was born. On the property David purchased and erected an altar, Solomon built the temple and dedicated it to the glory of God. What God did for David is certainly not an excuse for sin. However, knowing what God did for David does encourage us to seek His face and trust His grace when we have disobeyed Him. What a merciful God we serve!

Romans 5:20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Everything depends on the motive. When it is born of pride, it is the opening of a grave risk. If the motive is for service, it is from God; but if the motive is for individual pride, it is from satan.

2) Even though we sin against the Lord, He is faithful and more than willing to forgive us from our sins with His grace and mercy. But that shouldn't encourage us to commit more sins, but less.