

25. The Pride That Brought True Sacrifice

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A group of English tourists was visiting the house where Beethoven, the 18th century great composer, spent his last years and they came to the special room, the conservatory, where his piano sat.

The guide said rather quietly to the group, "And here is the master's piano." One thoughtless young woman pushed her way from the back of the room all the way up, sat down at the bench, and began to play one of Beethoven's sonatas, and then paused and said to the guide and the others in the group, "I suppose a lot of people enjoy playing this piano." "Well, Miss," the guide said, "Ignacy Paderewski was here last summer with a group and some wanted him to play this piano. And his answer was, "No, I cannot. I am not worthy."

Many of us who are in Christ Jesus were warned about the horror of the consequences which comes from our own pride. However, our carnal minds tend not to listen to the advice and the Word of God.

Here is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible regarding pride. People often say, "Pride goes before the fall."

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

Let's see what else the Lord says about our pride:

Proverbs 6:16 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, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

When we reach the top of our own status level, it is a common tendency for us to think that we are somewhat superior to others. We may start to think that it is us that got ourselves to the level. Oh, my brothers and sisters, when we are like that we are so ready for a nasty fall. In this final chapter of 2 Samuel, we see David – worn with age and gray at his temples – make a foolish decision based on pride. The consequences of his choices are staggering, and they remind us all of the seriousness of sin.

A. HEADCOUNT

2 Samuel 24:1-2 Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." 2 So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people."

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

The translators of the NKJVersion believe that "He" in this sentence applies to God because they capitalize it. Yet 1 Chronicles 21:1 tells us, "Now satan stood up against Israel," and moved David to number Israel. The best explanation is that satan moved David and is the "he" of here. Yet the Lord expressly allowed it as a chastisement against David. Remember, the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit without an error, but not the English translations we use.

David's fateful decision came on the heels of Israel's latest war with the Philistines. David and his valiant men had cut down four giants and a big army of Philistines. Fresh from the great victory David was vulnerable to pride once again.

There was nothing illegal about a national census if it was done according to the rules laid down in Exodus 30:

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 belonged to God. It was up to the Lord to command a counting and receive ransom money to "atone" for the counting.

What motivated David was not obedience to God but pride in his own power. By counting the people, he was calculating the potential strength of his army and in effect, insulting the faithfulness of God as the shield of Israel. David's census represented a dependence on human power rather than the Lord.

Don't you think it is rather a paradox for us to see David's great praise to the Lord in chapter 22 and his self-accomplishment feeling in chapter 24? Yes, we can do that exact same dumb thing.

At the early stage of our Bible study, that was before we started our Sunday morning services at the school, I was whining to the Lord about low attendance. The Lord heard it one too many times. He spoke to my heart one day, "If you have more than one person at the Bible study, it is more than you deserve." Ouch! Since then, I decided not to complain about the numbers.

Knowing the number of the congregation and comparing it with other churches is great for my haughty pride and terrible for my walk with Christ.

B. SO MUCH FOR JOAB'S OBJECTION

2 Samuel 24:3-4 And Joab said to the king, "Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?" 4 Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army. Therefore Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king to count the people of Israel.

What do you see here?

Joab wasn't afraid to speak to David when he thought the king was wrong. With the best interest of both David and Israel in mind, Joab tactfully asked David to reconsider this foolish desire to count the nation.

So late in his reign, David was tempted to take some of the glory himself. He looked at how Israel had grown and prospered during his reign – it was remarkable indeed. The spirit of vainglory in numbers had taken possession of the people and the king, and there was a tendency to trust in numbers and forget God.

David's decision reveals two things about his personal life at this time:

1) He was out of touch with the Lord.

We don't read of David's prayer, of seeking God's counsel or consulting one of God's prophets for help in his decision. He simply decided to do it.

2) He was unaccountable to anyone around him.

By dismissing Joab, not even answering his question, the mighty king of Israel showed that he didn't have to answer to anyone.

We find many Christian leaders fall into this problem today. The Lord blessed their ministries at the beginning stages, so the numbers of their congregation increased and their ministry finances became better. This gets into their heads and they actually start to believe that it has everything to do with them, not God. Oh yes, they do lip service of praise to God, but deep within their hearts, they pat their own backs. What they are doing is setting themselves up for a gigantic fall.

Blind ambition is a giant step away from God and one step closer to catastrophe. Sometimes God's greatest judgment is simply to let us have our own way.

C. THE CENSUS IS TAKEN

2 Samuel 24:5-9 And they crossed over the Jordan and camped in Aroer, on the right side of the town which is in the midst of the ravine of Gad, and toward Jazer. 6 Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim Hodshi; they came to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon; 7 and they came to the stronghold of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites. Then they went out to South Judah as far as Beersheba. 8 So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. 9 Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to the king. And there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

What is your interpretation of this?

It took almost 12 months before David confessed his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. David should have run to God for His forgiveness from the beginning, but he didn't. It took almost 10 months to complete the census. David should have called off this foolish census during the 10 months, but he didn't.

The longer we hover over our sins, the guilt in our hearts becomes dull against our conscience.

The results showed that there were 1,300,000 fighting men among the twelve tribes, reflecting an estimated total population of about 6 million in Israel.

However, in the parallel verse, 1 Chronicles 21:5, the total number is widely different. In Israel 1,100,000, in Judah 470,000. Although the original writers of the Old Testament wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit, yet we are not told that the same influence descended on all copiers of their words to prevent them from making mistakes.

D. CONVICTION AND CONSEQUENCES

2 Samuel 24:10-17 And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly." 11 Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 12 "Go

and tell David, 'Thus says the Lord: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you."' 13 So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me." 14 And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. 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." 15 So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel from the morning till the appointed time. From Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men of the people died. 16 And when the angel stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. 17 Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."

What do you get out of this?

The man after God's heart was not sinless but had a heart sensitive to sin when it was committed. David now saw his own pride and vainglory that prompted him to do such a foolish thing.

The grim ramifications of his choice bound David in a horrible dilemma. Wisely, he chose to leave everything in the hands of God. David knew that God is far more merciful and gracious than any man would be.

When David saw the angel was about to attack the people of Jerusalem, he fell on his face before God and shifted the full weight of blame upon himself.

E. TRUE SACRIFICE COSTS

2 Samuel 24:18-25 And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." 19 So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. 20 Now Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming toward him. So Araunah went out and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. 21 Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." 22 Now Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever seems good to him. Look, here are oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing implements and the yokes of the oxen for wood. 23 All these, O king, Araunah has given to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God accept you." 24 Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

Now God wanted David to meet Him there in worship. The threshing floor of Araunah had both a rich past and a rich future. 2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us that the threshing floor of Araunah was on Mount Moriah. It is the same hill where Abraham offered Isaac in Genesis 22:2. It became a place of sacrifice and worship because this land purchased by David became the site for Solomon's temple in 1 Chronicles 21:28-22:5. And it is the same set of hills, Golgotha, where Jesus died on the cross in Matthew 27:32.

It is a noble thing that David does. Oh, that God's people would learn this lesson! Some people feel that we should not mention finances in God's work today. I recognize that there is an overemphasis on money, but consider what David did. Araunah wanted to give David the threshing floor. David said, *"nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing."*

Would you be impressed by the present that was originally given by somebody to your friend and then he or she gives it to you? I am sure not. If it is an offering to the Lord, if it is a sacrifice to the Lord, it should cost us something. If it is not, it is nothing more than a passing gift to God and it should not be categorized as a sacrifice.

David understood the true meaning of sacrifice and offering. Webster defines 'sacrifice' like this: Forfeiture of something highly valued for the sake of one considered to have a greater value or claim. He gave up his possession to return to his close relationship with God.

God still has mercy on the people who are taking a spiritual free ride today. 85% of evangelical church congregations do not tithe. These are the people who are missing out on their blessings from God because of their tight fist on their possessions. They expect works of God to be done by someone else's expenses, not theirs. My friends, stop the spiritual free ride and pay your way, and God will honor and bless you.

This action of David's is heart-searching. Are we attempting to give to God that which costs us nothing? Oh Lord, forgive us for being so cheap sometimes. May we give to You as David gave.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Let's be accountable.

To live an unaccountable life is to invite danger.

2) Let's remember sin's consequences to us and the loved ones around us.

Keep the seventy thousand Israelites' fresh graves in your mind.

3) Let's take God seriously.

Failing to do so is to deny His lordship in our lives.