

# The Lord's Great Mercy

## Text: 2 Samuel 24

**Introduction:** We come this morning to the end of our journey through 1 and 2 Samuel. I realize it may not seem like it, but we've been moving at a very fast pace through these two action packed narratives of the lives of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David. Between the two books, 1 and 2 Samuel contain 55 chapters which we have covered in 59 sermons. I've been instructed, corrected, challenged, and encouraged as we've made our way through 1 and 2 Samuel, and I pray you have as well.

Brandon Hembree from Impact Church of Fredericksburg will be with us next week. I'm looking forward to having Brandon back at Goshen to update us on the work God is doing at Impact and also to preach God's Word. Then the week after that is our AWANA awards. I'll be preaching a sermon from Psalm 119 about how God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Our next extended sermon series will be on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. As I've thought and prayed about where to go from here, I've grown convicted that what we really need in this moment is the mind of Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is the longest recorded teaching of Jesus that we have. So, it seems appropriate to me that we would turn there in seeking to have the mind of Christ.

That series will likely be around 16 sermons and will lead us right up to the beginning of Advent. In the meantime, I have a few standalone sermons that I will preach before we jump into the Sermon on the Mount.

But for one last time this morning, you can turn in your Bible to 2 Samuel if you haven't already. We're in 2 Samuel 24. It begins on page 258 in the black pew Bible in front of you. 2 Samuel 24. If you don't own a Bible, we encourage you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read 2 Samuel 24...Pray)

2 Samuel 24 shows us that **David needed the Lord's great mercy, and we do too.**

We've seen David's need for the Lord's mercy throughout the books of Samuel, and it seems appropriate that we would focus on that need this morning as we turn our attention to this last chapter of 2 Samuel. 2 Samuel 24 urges us first to...

### I. Recognize the Lord's great mercy (2 Samuel 24:1-10).

#### A. The chapter begins in verse 1 with a lot of unanswered questions.

1. **The first question is the timing of these events.**
  - a. **The text says, "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (vs. 1a).**
  - b. **We don't know exactly when the events of 2 Samuel 24 occurred. We really only know that they took place during the reign of David as king.**
  - c. **You'll remember that the last four chapters of 2 Samuel form an epilogue to the book that is not necessarily ordered chronologically.**
  - d. **It is likely, however, that the events of 2 Samuel 24 did take place after the events of chapter 21 where we saw the anger of the Lord kindled against Israel before.**
  - e. **That's probably what the author means by "again."**
2. **The second unanswered question is the reason for the Lord's anger.**
  - a. **We know that the Lord's anger "was kindled against Israel," but we don't know why. The text doesn't tell us.**
  - b. **But this detail of the Lord's anger against Israel becomes very important as the narrative continues.**
3. **We also wonder what it means that the Lord "incited David against" Israel.**
  - a. **It seems that at least in some sense, the Lord intended to use David in His judgment of Israel.**

- b. Interestingly enough, 1 Chronicles 21 contains a parallel account of the same events recorded in 2 Samuel 24, and it says that “Satan...incited David to number Israel.”
- c. This perhaps reminds us of Job 1 where Satan was allowed to test Job. It was the Lord’s purpose that Job be tested. But it was Satan who carried out that testing. Demonstrating that God is sovereign over everyone and everything, including Satan.
- d. It’s hard for us to wrap our minds around exactly how that plays out, but we know from Scripture that the Lord is able to use both good and evil human acts for His purposes without compromising His holiness.
- e. In Genesis 50, we see that what Joseph’s brothers intended for evil, God intended for good. And in the crucifixion of Jesus, we know that it was carried out by evil men according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God as Peter states so clearly in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.
- f. Because of the way that it’s written here in verse 1, we might think that God commanded David to take the census. But that is likely not what the author intends to communicate. Rather, it seems most likely here that God worked in and through David’s own desire to conduct a census.
- g. The relationship between the desires of man, the works of the devil, and the purposes of God is hard for us to fully understand. It’s hard to wrap our minds around it. What’s clear from Scripture is the man is completely responsible for his own sinful actions. Satan is completely responsible for his sinful actions. And God is somehow sovereign over it all yet perfectly righteous in all His ways.

**B. After determining to conduct a census, David seeks to enlist the military commander Joab to carry it out (vs. 2-9).**

- 1. Look at verse 2. (Read vs. 2)
- 2. And initially, Joab objects. He says... (Read vs. 3)

- 3. We don’t really know the specifics of Joab’s objection. He clearly thought that David should not “delight” in conducting a census. But we don’t know why.
- 4. Ultimately though, the will of the king prevailed. Joab and his men traveled all over Israel to conduct the census that David commanded (vs. 4-8).
- 5. It took them nine months and twenty days. But Joab returned with a report of the number of valiant men. 800,000 in Israel and 500,000 in Judah (vs. 9).
- 6. There are questions concerning the numbers that we can’t get into this morning because it’s all just speculation and really is beside the point. The point is that David commanded Joab to conduct the census, and Joab did as he was commanded.

**C. Where we really get to the heart of the issue is in verse 10.**

- 1. (Read vs. 10)
- 2. This raises an immediate question for us. What was the big deal with conducting a census? Why does David now say, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done?”
- 3. We don’t have time to turn there this morning, but Exodus 31:11- 16 provides the procedure for taking a census of Israel. So, it was not wrong simply to take a census.
- 4. The problem seems to be with David’s motive in ordering the census.
  - a. Perhaps David wanted to count the people as a prideful reminder to himself of his own greatness as king over this vast number of people.
  - b. Also, the numbers reported were of the valiant men who drew the sword. Perhaps David had some kind of personal military ambitions. Or maybe he just wanted to revel in the size and strength of the military at his command.
- 5. Whatever it was, David knew in his heart that it was wrong.

6. Isn't this the sign of someone who is in relationship with the Lord? David was a sinner just like you and me. But he also had a conscience that convicted him when he sinned against God. As followers of Jesus, you and I are still sinners. We will not be completely free from sin until we are with the Lord in eternity. But if you are a follower of Jesus, you don't continue in your sin without conviction. The Holy Spirit, working through your conscience, convicts you of your sin and calls you to repentance.
7. In a different way, but in a real way, David also was filled with the Holy Spirit. He experienced the Lord's conviction of sin. And he said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done."
8. And then what does David say? He pleads with the Lord for mercy. He says, "But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly." David recognizes his need for the Lord's mercy.
9. The people of Israel were sinners. The Lord's anger was kindled against them. And their king was a sinner too. A sinner who needed the Lord's mercy.
10. The same is true of you and me, isn't it? We are sinners in need of mercy from the Lord. We must recognize that reality and live in light of it. Let us never think that we've got things figured out on our own. We need the Lord. We need His mercy. Praise God that His mercy is new every morning.
11. Notice David's words at the end of verse 10: "For I have done very foolishly." Do you realize that sin is always foolish? Do you hear that, children? Teenagers? Adults? Seniors? Sin is always foolish. It may seem good for a moment. But it is foolish.

2 Samuel 24 urges us to recognize the Lord's great mercy. It also urges us to...

## II. Rely upon the Lord's great mercy (2 Samuel 24:11-17).

- A. We might expect verse 11 and the verses that follow to go differently than they do.
  1. In verse 10, David confesses his sin to God, and he seeks the Lord's forgiveness. We know that God is faithful and just to forgive sin when we confess it to him.
  2. Certainly, the Lord is willing to forgive David for his sin. But that does not mean the end of the consequences of sin. That's one of the great lessons of 2 Samuel, isn't it? God will forgive you of the most heinous of sins. Adultery. Murder. Whatever it is. Just like He did for David. But the earthly consequences of sin often endure. Just as they did for David.
- B. God sends the prophet Gad to David with a message.
  1. This is a little different from the time that Nathan confronted David in his sin. On that occasion, David needed the blinders removed from his eyes with regard to his sin. This time, David recognizes his sin, but he doesn't yet know what the Lord is going to do in response to his sin.
  2. Look at verses 11-13. (Read vs. 11-13)
  3. Now, this immediately strikes us as odd, doesn't it? Why does the Lord give David three options for the consequence for his sin?
  4. It kind of reminds me of the times when my mom would be ready to discipline me for something, and she would send me out in the yard to get my own switch. And you better get a good one too, or the result would be even worse.
  5. I don't know why God gives David a choice here. The text doesn't tell us. Perhaps it was to show mercy to David by allowing him to choose the punishment that Israel would receive. In doing so, God certainly makes clear the link between David's sin and Israel's judgment.

6. With the three choices, there were decreasing periods of time that David was to choose between: 3 years, 3 months, or three days. But it seems that the intensity of the suffering was greater with the shorter periods of time.
7. Woodhouse writes, “These three options should not be seen simply as punishments for whatever offense David committed by his census....Rather, the census was the means by which the Lord brought a punishment on Israel for the offense that had kindled his anger at the beginning of this episode” (Woodhouse, 544).
8. All of that is a lot to try to wrap our minds around. One of my favorite preachers is Alistair Begg. He has a saying that he says often, “The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.” There’s a lot in 2 Samuel 24 that we could wrap our minds into pretzels trying to figure out. But the main ideas that I believe the Lord wants us to take away from this chapter are quite clear.
9. Here, it’s that there was not anything David could do to protect God’s people from God’s judgment. In fact, David is the instrument God uses to bring about His judgment.
10. But there has come one who is greater than David. Of course, I’m talking about the Lord Jesus. And He IS able to deliver us from the wrath of God. He came and lived and died to pay for our sin. He took God’s wrath on Himself. In our place. As our substitute. He did what David could not do. He did what no one else in all of human history could do. He delivered us from the wrath to come. He came not as an instrument of God’s judgment, but of God’s great mercy.
11. David’s response to the Lord in verse 14 stands out. (Read vs. 14) Notice that David doesn’t choose. He doesn’t know what to do. The only thing he knows to do is the only thing he can do. He throws himself on the mercy of God. For His mercy is great.

12. We have a lot to learn from David in this, don’t we? There’s not anything we can do to deliver ourselves or anyone else from the judgment we deserve for our sin. Our only hope is the mercy of God. Our only hope is to throw ourselves on His mercy. For His mercy is great.

C. Ultimately, the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel as judgment for their sin.

1. We don’t know a lot of specifics about the pestilence. Only that it was very deadly. The text says that 70,000 men died. Again, there’s some question about how to understand the numbers here. But the point is that over 5% of the men counted in the census died.
2. Notice that the pestilence was completely under the Lord’s control. He sent it. And it continued “until the appointed time.”
3. We see the Lord’s mercy in verse 16. (Read vs. 16a)
4. And David again speaks to the Lord in verse 17. (Read vs. 17)
5. David is right concerning his own sin, but he’s wrong about Israel’s innocence. We saw that at the beginning of the chapter. “The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.” This wasn’t just about David and his sin. It was about all the people and their collective sin against God, whatever that specific sin was.
6. The fact that the Lord relented from the calamity is evidence of his mercy. It would have been just for God to finish the judgment. We don’t know how many more men would have died had He not done so. But in His great mercy, the Lord said, “It is enough; now stay your hand” (vs. 16).
7. Do you see that? The Lord sent the pestilence. The Lord caused it to continue until the appointed time. And then the Lord caused it to cease. He’s the sovereign God of the universe. He always does what He intends. He’s never powerless. He’s never unable to do what He sets out to do. He’s God.

8. **And He is great in mercy. David was completely reliant on the Lord's mercy. Both for himself and the people of Israel. That's what he is pleading for when he says to the Lord, "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house" (vs. 17).**
9. **In the same way, we are completely reliant upon the mercy of God. We deserve God's judgment for our sin. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). And the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). God is holy. He is just. He must punish sin. But we have experienced His mercy in that He doesn't punish us for our sin. Instead, He punished His Son. The Lord Jesus. Jesus took our sin and judgment on Himself. And we get the Lord's mercy.**
10. **May we learn to rely upon the Lord's mercy. We need it every day. Every hour. I need thee every hour. Every hour I need Thee.**

We recognize the Lord's great mercy. We rely upon the Lord's great mercy. And finally, we...

### **III. Receive the Lord's great mercy (2 Samuel 24:18-25).**

#### **A. We see in verse 18 that Gad instructed David to make an altar to the Lord.**

1. **The command was ultimately from the Lord.**
2. **The altar was to be constructed on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. This was the very location where God had brought an end to the pestilence.**
3. **So, upon receiving the word from Gad, David set out to do as the Lord commanded him.**
4. **When David arrived at the threshing floor, Araunah went out, paid homage to the king, and said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" (vs. 20-21).**
5. **To which David responded, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be averted from the people" (vs. 21).**

6. **Araunah said, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." Araunah said, "May the Lord your God accept you" (vs. 22-23).**

#### **B. David's response to Araunah's offer stands out.**

1. **David said, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing" (vs. 24a).**
2. **This is a reminder to us that the Lord deserves our very best. We do not bring the leftovers of our lives to the Lord. We bring Him the very best. We gather together on the first day of the week, Sunday, the Lord's Day. To worship our God. We give of our time. We give of our energy. We give of our talents. We give of our money. The firstfruits of those things. Not the leftovers. For the Lord deserves our very best.**
3. **The text then says that "David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver" (vs. 24b).**
4. **This is important because it shows us that the site came into Israelite ownership by legitimate means. David bought the property. It would become the site where David's son Solomon would build a temple for the Lord. It was important that it was acquired through legitimate means.**

#### **C. And in the last verse of the last chapter of 2 Samuel, we see that David's final act recorded in the books of Samuel was the offering of sacrifices.**

1. **Look at verse 25, "And David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings" (vs. 25a).**
2. **Burnt offerings were the most common of all Old Testament sacrifices. Their purpose was to atone for human sin by propitiating God's wrath. Peace offerings were a celebration of peace with God and all that flows from that blessing.**

3. **And how did the Lord respond? Look at the rest of the verse. “So the LORD responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel” (vs. 25b).**
4. **David and the people received the Lord’s great mercy.**

**Conclusion:** 2 Samuel 24 is a reminder of the sinfulness of man. It’s also a reminder of the holiness of God. But most importantly, it’s a reminder of the Lord’s great mercy. David needed the Lord’s great mercy, and Goshen, we do too.

There are so many sinful people who show up throughout the narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel. There’s Eli and Hophni and Phineas. There’s Saul and his commander Abner. There’s Ish-bosheth. And Joab and Abishai. There’s Amnon and Absalom. There’s Ziba and Shimei and many others.

And then there is David. A man after God’s own heart. The Lord’s anointed. The one God promised, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16).

But like everyone else in 1 and 2 Samuel, he was a sinner too. In fact, you might call him the chief of sinners in 1 and 2 Samuel. Israel wanted a king who would deliver her from all her enemies. And David did deliver Israel from many of her enemies. But he was unable to deliver her from her most serious enemy. The enemy of sin and death.

Only David’s descendant would be able to do that. His offspring. The one of whom God said, “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom” (2 Sam. 7:12).

God was talking about Jesus. The one identified in the New Testament as the Son of David. A true King. A better King. King of kings. And Lord of lords. Perfectly righteous in all His ways. He came to do what David could not do. Deliver His people from the final enemy of sin and death. He did so through His sinless life. He did so through His sacrificial death on the cross to pay for our sin. And He did so through His resurrection from the grave.

He ascended into heaven where He has been highly exalted by God the Father. And one day, He will return to establish His kingdom forever. A kingdom that is free of sin and death. A kingdom where there will be no more brokenness. A kingdom where the former things will have passed away. A kingdom where God’s people will dwell with Him in perfect peace. All because of Jesus.

Goshen, we have received the Lord’s great mercy, haven’t we? We don’t deserve it. We deserve death. But God has been merciful to us in Christ. Praise be to God!