

## “Altar’d - At What Cost?”

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 21:18-26

Graphics: altar, fire, guilt offering

Big Truth: God calls us to surrender our control and demonstrate our commitment through obedience. Are you willing to commit only when it’s conditional, when it’s convenient, or when it’s on your own terms? Jesus walked toward the cross in full obedience without condition. Are we willing to let go of control in order to commit ourselves fully in obedience? Are we willing to fully surrender? Are we willing to have an undivided heart? Are we willing to surrender our past to embrace the God’s freedom for the future?

Focus Phrase: Our cost to follow Christ is to surrender our failure.

### 1. Introduction

- A. The title of this message is *At What Cost?*
- B. Everything in our lives has a cost. There’s nothing that is free, even if it says free. I’ve put some things at the road with a FREE sign, but if someone wanted that piece of furniture or scrap, they need to load it up, haul it away. There’s a cost to everything in some way for another.
- C. Earlier in the worship service, we read the brief narrative from the gospel of John about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of his last week on earth. At the end of that week, Jesus would pay the ultimate price - physical pain and death - for the salvation of the world. And he paid that price willingly for YOU and ME!
- D. So, if we could ask Jesus this morning, “At what cost?” He would confidently say to us, “The price I paid was to give my very life so that you could live yours forever with me!”
- E. Jesus laid his life down on the altar that the Father built for him...the spotless, sinless lamb slain for the sins of the world.
- F. And there are so many rich and powerful scripture passages that tell us of the sacrifice of Jesus for us...the cost he paid:
  - i. “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8
  - ii. “...he entered once for all into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.” Hebrews 9:12
  - iii. “For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21
- G. Jesus had no sin...no mistakes...no failures. And yet, he died as a sinner so that we could become the righteousness of God!
- H. And ALL THAT for us, despite our sin...our mistakes...our failures?

- I. Today's altar comes to us by way of King David - shepherd to flocks of his father, slayer of Goliath, musician to the world, anointed King of Israel, adulterer with Bathsheba, murderer of Bathsheba's husband, and on and on. We could use lots of examples of David's fame and failures.
- J. But in today's scripture - today's altar - David offers a sacrifice on an altar he built to atone for a very specific sin, that most people forget about. One that doesn't seem like a big deal. But one for which God required a sacrifice to atone for sin and guilt.
- K. As followers of Jesus, God knows we will fail. Let me just get that out of the way. That's not an excuse to look for failure. Yet, we follow One who gave up everything FOR our failures.
- L. In your notes, write this: **Our cost to follow Christ is to surrender our failure.**
- M. Let's pray and then dive into our altar scripture today...
- N. **PRAY!** (Jesus, You are Lord...)
- O. Turn to 1 Chronicles 21 starting in verse 18...

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ 1 Chronicles 21:18-26

- B. Do you remember your first failure? Or your latest failure?
- C. I have some doozies. I got fired from a retail job once because I didn't like folding shirts, and "apparently" that was an important part of working at a retail clothing store. Who knew?
- D. I've failed tests, failed leadership challenges, failed my family, at times.
- E. Every time I (we) experience failure, we know what feelings are about to come with it. Shame. Embarrassment. Regret. Anger. Feeling stupid. You get it.
- F. It's interesting that whether you are six, or thirty-six, or 76, the feelings associated with failure are the same.
- G. So, how has failure touched your life? Maybe you've felt crushed by the weight and shame and guilt of failure. Most of us have; we remember how we felt, who watched us fail, and what was said.
- H. Failure comes in many forms. Failure at a job. Failure in relationships. Failure in your finances. Failure in school.
- I. But what was David's failure that led to this moment of repentance and sacrifice on the altar at the trashing floor of Or'nan the Jebusite?
  - i. Well, as we know, David had experienced great success in conquering the land for God's people. But then he did something that doesn't sound all that bad, to US. Yet, to God it was catastrophic.

- ii. 1 Chronicles 21:1, “Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to count the people of Israel.”
- iii. The act of taking a census was not bad on its own, but David was not acting on God’s authority. Led by pride, David wanted to see how great of a king he’d become. Taking a census was often done just before going to war, to know the power of your forces.
- iv. But really, David took this census because he wanted to know how great a nation Israel had become and he wanted to see how great HE had become as their leader.
- v. 1 Chronicles 21:2, “So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, ‘Go, number Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, and bring me a report, so that I may know their number.’”
- vi. Joab the commander, knew immediately that David was taking his eyes off the Lord. His officials objected to the census, but they went along with it, and reported the number to their king.
- vii. In verse 21:3 “But Joab said, ‘May the Lord increase the number of his people a hundredfold! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord’s servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?’”
- viii. In 21:7-8, “But God was displeased with this thing, and he struck Israel. David said to God, ‘I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. But now, please remove the guilt of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.’”
- ix. As soon as David heard the number of the people, he realized his sin. As a consequence, God sent a plague upon his people. THIS was the failure that sets up David’s altar story.
- x. Just like David, we all fail; what matters is what we DO after we fail.
- xi. Author Susan Kent writes, “It’s not the failures that define us, but what we do with them.”**
- xii. When David realized his sin, he said, in 1 Chron. 21:13, “I am in great distress; let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is very great, but let me not fall into human hands.”
- xiii. David , in some ways, got to choose his consequences. He chose to accept God’s punishment because he knew that the Lord was more merciful than the people he served.
- xiv. When we fail, even though we face consequences, we can trust in the Lord’s grace and mercy.

- xv. Other people may judge us the more severely. People may try to remind us of our failure until shame places a permanent mark on our hearts. David could've been overwhelmed by the shame of his actions.
- xvi. He could've kept beating himself up. But David knew that if he could give the pain of his mistake to God, his relationship with God could be restored. The consequences would still be there...but he would begin the process.
- J. To DO that, he needed to build an altar and make the sacrifice.
- K. In this case, it was the last of the Old Testament sacrifices we'll look at: the guilt offering. The guilt offering was provided by God so His people could make restitution for the sin they committed.
- L. That restitution required paying over and above the price of the sin. It's like in Luke 19, when Zacchaeus the greedy tax collector encountered Christ, and he realized his sin of overcharging people for taxes. So he not only paid back what he took, but paid over and above out of his own pocket. This was an example of restitution for his sin.
- M. David laid it all out on that altar...and God answered his plea for forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration as a leader.
- N. Let me read verse 26 again, "David built there an altar to the Lord and presented burnt offerings and offerings of well-being. He called upon the Lord, and he answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering."
- O. David needed to fully surrender his sin, and in utter humility offer everything to God so that God could begin to restore David, despite what he'd done and in spite of what others thought of him.

### **3. Application**

- A. How can you and I face the Lord when we have failed, not once, but time after time? What do we do with our failure? Do you beat yourself up, and hide from God and others? Or do you face your sin and lay it at the cross?
- B. Psalm 73:26 says: "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."
- C. Psalm 145:14, "The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down."
- D. When you humble yourself - and I mean base-level humility, not false humility or mere regret - and give your failure to the Lord, not only will He meet you and forgive you, but he will make you stronger and grow your character.
- E. The Apostle Paul experienced failure, which the Lord used to teach others. In Romans 5:3-5, Paul writes: "And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to

shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

- F. So what is your next step when you fail? Hide from God and others, and beat yourself up? Stuff your feelings and hope they go away? Forget about it, and repeat the same failure again? I hope not.
- G. When we fail, we must **Humble Ourselves, and Seek the face of God.**
  - i. Like David, you and I are called, to create a space to encounter our merciful Father so He can forgive us, and use our failures to transform us.
  - ii. In 1 Chronicles 21:22, David desired to create a space to encounter God; he wanted to build an altar.
  - iii. This can be the altar here in this sanctuary, one you build physically or spiritually at home, in your car, in the woods...wherever. It doesn't matter where. What matters is that wherever it is, you humble yourself and seek nothing but the face of God.
- H. Then, Step 2, is to **Humbly Offer Your Failure There in faith to be restored.**
  - i. God wants to restore you. Fully restore you. If that were not so, then Jesus would not have died on the cross to fully atone for your sin.
  - ii. Humility is what God requires - in light of the weight of your failure, and my failures.
  - iii. Psalm 51:17 says, "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."
  - iv. In faith, offer your failure on the altar and confidently anticipate that God will forgive you, reconcile you, and, in time, restore you.
- I. As followers of Jesus, we don't have the option of not facing a holy God and offering our failure at the altars to which Jesus is inviting us.
- J. Jesus also said that the cost of being a disciple is high...and when we start that journey, you and I had better count the cost so that we can remain faithful to the end.
- K. That road will lead through our failures, but will not stop us from God's love for us in Jesus Christ.
- L. **Our cost to follow Christ is to surrender our failure.**

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. David failed. David was not a failure. There's an important difference for us. God used David despite his failures and David paid the cost by surrendering his failures to God on that altar.
- B. Because of David's faith in God, even his failures were used by God for good. He had many consequences of those failures, for sure, but God remained

faithful to use every failure to grow him and use him more and more. David needed to offer the sacrifices to a holy God.

- C. Jesus, the One who humbly rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, knew no sin, no failures, did not deserve to be killed on a Roman cross like a failure.
- D. Yet, Jesus WAS the offering, giving everything for us to be restored fully to a holy God. This week, we get to walk that road...to the Cross...and then to the empty tomb next Sunday! You won't want to miss any of it!
- E. So in the midst of your failure, will you build an altar, and remember the cross of Christ? To lay your sin and failure at his feet?
- F. It is then that he forgives us, he makes us new, and restores what had been lost. We get to walk out of that grave with Jesus, restored...all for God's glory!
- G. Be Altar'd. Let's pray...**