

# Hope is on the Horizon

2 Samuel 24:1-25

*The Twenty-Fifth Sermon on Second Samuel*

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We all have our favorite story, book, or movie, and as the saying goes, all things must come to an end. What's your favorite? How does it end? Here is the end of the story of David in the book of Samuel. It's been a wonderful story, hasn't it? Israel was in one of its cycles of sin, judgment, and repentance that we read about in the book of Judges. One woman's prayer changed the church—Hannah's prayer. And so the Lord raised up Samuel to be prophet in Israel. The Lord gave Israel their sinful desire in Saul as their king, only to show them what a true king was not as he was preparing the way for the king after his own heart, David. We've seen the eighth, insignificant son of Jesse anointed, serving Saul with devotion despite Saul's madness in trying to kill him, defeating Goliath and the Philistine time and time again, and we've seen David's ups and downs, his triumphs and tragedies, his sins and his sorrows for them. We now come to the end. Yet ends bring new beginnings. The end of story brings with it new possibilities of further stories. And that's what we see here: *Hope is on the Horizon*.

1. *The Persistence of Sin*
2. *The Place of Sacrifice*

May the Holy Spirit lead us into the truth of his Word today.

## The Persistence of Sin

The end of the story sounds so familiar to us as it replays many of the same themes we've seen before: sin, judgment, and repentance. So I want you to see here *the persistence of sin*. This part of the story is like the dark backdrop of a movies screen upon which light begins to shine.

Right from the outset this story poses a lot of deep, serious questions. **Again**—in addition to the many times before—**the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah”** (v. 1). But these deep, serious questions are not answered by our text. Why was David's act of census taking so sinful? We're not told. Some say because he didn't follow the law and require a payment of atonement from each soldier (Ex. 30:11–16). Some say need to infer his motivation for self-grandeur. Some say he was preparing for future military conquest without the authorization of the Lord. How is it that the Lord seems to be the cause of David's sin here? The narrator gives no answer. Over in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 21:1 it says that Satan did this, so theologically speaking this fits with the rest of Scripture saying that God uses the means of Satan to test his people. In the end Romans 9 rings true here: we are clay, God is the potter, and who are we to question him?

So David sins, again. He tells Joab to go throughout all the land from the north in Dan to the south in Beersheba to take a census of all the military aged men in Israel (v. 2). Joab objects (v. 3), but David prevails (v. 4) and Joab and his

men do this and find that there are 800,000 men in Israel as well as 500,000 in just Judah (vv. 5–9). Isn't this how our sinful works? I've told my kids that before there were paved roads all there was were dirt roads. And over time as horses, and then covered wagons and stagecoaches, and finally cars drove over those roads grooves and ruts began to form in the ground and you would just follow those. Sin is like those grooves and ruts. You do it once, then again, and then again, to the point where you can't get out of that path of life. We praise God that there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ, but even as believers we still struggle with besetting sins.

And just like in David's life before, when he sins he shows sorrow for his sins. Remember after he took Bathsheba and had Uriah killed. David was so calloused at that time that it took the prophet Nathan to confront him and wake him up to his sin. But I want you to notice that here at the end of David's life, yes there is sin, but there is also a conscience that has developed and grown to the point that he knows his sin even before he's told he's sinned. **But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly"** (v. 10). Then the next day the prophet Gad came (v. 11). As an unbeliever I would just sin. As a young believer I would sin, but thankfully I had an older mentor in my life who would say ever so gently, "You know, the Lord doesn't want you to talk like that as it doesn't glorify him or present a good witness to Jesus." I sinned but had to be taught that I was sinning. Now I know ahead of the sin if my thoughts, words, and

deeds displease the Lord. As the Spirit of God works in our lives over the course of time, what we see in David becomes true of us. And so he cries out to the Lord in his moment of conviction.

This episode in the story comes to an end as Gad the prophet comes from the Lord with a choice of punishments (v. 12): three years of famine, three months of being pursued by his enemies, or three days of pestilence (v. 13). Three days of pestilence ensues (v. 15), seventy-thousand men die (v. 15), and as the angel of the Lord came to Jerusalem, David cries out, **“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”** (v. 17). David substitutes himself to take the punishment. What a beautiful picture to us of Jesus! And we see that more in the story as it unfolds.

## **The Place of Sacrifice**

So why does the Lord relent from punishing Jerusalem and from killing David? There's a second part to our story, *the place of sacrifice*. Gad comes again and tells David to **“raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah** (literally, *“the Araunah”*) **the Jebusite”** (v. 18). So David does this, and verses 19–24 tell the story. What's vital is the end in verse 25: **And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.** Why was the plague averted? Because David pled with the Lord to

take upon himself his people's punishment and he established a place for sacrifices to be offered on their behalf. And who told him this place was to be the place? Gad spoke the word that the Lord commanded (v. 19). Do you see what that means? Just like with Abraham who said to his son Isaac, whom he was preparing to sacrifice, "The Lord will provide the sacrifice," so too with David it is the Lord who provides the sacrifice.

And what about this particular place, **the threshing floor of Araunah**, makes it so special? Turn with me to 1 Chronicles 22:1. What do we read? This would be the place of the altar of offering for the temple. No keep turning to 2 Chronicles 3:1. There we read that this threshing floor that is turned into an altar was Mount Moriah. What is Mount Moriah? The place Abraham was to sacrifice his son, Isaac! Isn't that amazing? The great Yankee baseball player Yogi Berra was known for his sayings and one of them was, "The more things change, the more things stay the same;" another was, "It's like déjà vu all over again." You see, when we read Scripture asking the question, "What does this story say about the Lord Jesus Christ?" we begin to see these themes over and over again until Jesus comes and fulfills them.

Here we have King David, willing to die for his people in order to turn away the wrath of God from his people. Yet, it wasn't time for one man to do that. Just like it wasn't time for Isaac to die back in Genesis 22. So the Lord provided the ram in the place of Isaac and here the Lord provided the place of sacrifice for the people. Yet this all comes to fruition when another King, the great King of David's

dynasty, Jesus Christ, came. He came to lay down his life. He came to be the one who would offer himself on the altar of the cross to avert the judgment of God. When he was offered, the full fury of the fire from heaven on those sacrifices came down on him as he cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” So the story speaks to us. We persistently sin but the Lord has provided a place of sacrifice, not to offer ourselves but to receive his offering on our behalf.

## **Conclusion**

All sinners like David are invited to the cross, where your sin stained souls are exchanged for the white robes of Christ’s righteousness; where guilt is removed and exchange for acceptance; where shame is removed and exchanged for joy; where hell is exchanged for heaven; where death is replaced with life. Will you come?

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin.<sup>1</sup>

There is never a care or burden,  
There is never a grief or loss,  
But that Jesus in love will lighten  
When carried to the cross.<sup>2</sup>

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,  
a wondrous beauty I see,  
for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,  
to pardon and sanctify me.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the hymn, “How Great Thou Art.”

<sup>2</sup> From the hymn, “Wonderful, Wonderful Jesus.”

<sup>3</sup> From the hymn, “The Old Rugged Cross.”