



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Lessons from the Life of David

2 Samuel 24

“The Follies of the Favored”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re turning in our series of studies on the Life of David to 2 Samuel chapter 24. We’re drawing near the end of our series on this great king from the Old Testament. So if you have your Bibles, turn with me to 2 Samuel chapter 24, and we’ll begin reading at verse 1 and read through the entire chapter.

“Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” 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.” 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?” 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. 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. Then they came to Gilead and to the land of

Tahtim Hodshi; they came to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon, 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. So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. 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.”

Now, if this was modern, of course, we'd have to add another verse or two to describe the debate over the accuracy of the totals and, also, the affects it might have on the number of congressmen and senators and whatever that might be in the state legislature. So there are some advantages in having a king instead of a president and a congress. And they lie in the background, not stated by our text, of course, but, nevertheless, my thoughts, occasionally, run along those lines. That's my public apology. Verse 10.

“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.' Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, '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.' 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.' And David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress.'”

The Hebrew text is very pointed here. And it reads something like this, very short, *tsarah ma'od*, “distress for me exceedingly.” And one gathers that David blurts it out in a way to express the felling that he felt at the moment, faced with this decision.

“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.”

If there was anyone who understood what it meant to fall into the hand of men, it was David, who had been chased over the mountains and hills and valleys of the land by Saul for a lengthy period of time.

“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.”

I need to say one thing at this point. Someone after the morning message at eight thirty, came up and asked a question that requires me to mention in a sentence or two, something of some significance. This plague was not simply upon David. That is evident from the opening verse of the chapter. And it's not simply because of the census because as we begin chapter 24, “Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel,” and the reference is to something that happened in the 14th chapter for which there had not been chastisement, and also, for the fact that Israel had rebelled, remember, against the Lord in seeking to overthrow David and his anointing as king. So the seventy thousand men who lose their lives as a result of the census, should be identified as belonging to the other ways in which the people had been displeasing to the Lord as well. At least, that's my opinion.

“And when the angel stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented [Some of you have translations that read, “repented.” The one I am reading has “relented.”] relented or repented 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.”

And, incidentally, in the parallel account in 1 Chronicles chapter 21, other details are found there that are not found here. A bit more emphasis is placed upon the angel of the Lord. And those of you who have studied the Scriptures will remember that the angel of the Lord, in many of the appearances of the Old Testament is representative of a theophany, an appearance of God before the time of the incarnation, and it is the general opinion of theologians that the theophany of the angel of the Lord is an anticipation of the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the appearance of God in the flesh. In fact, it was a kind of preparation for Israel for the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, in fact, the description given in 1 Chronicles chapter 21, underlines that since there he is pictured as the angel of the Lord with a sword in his hand, carrying out the judgment of the plague. And those of you who have read Joshua will remember that Joshua came into contact, himself, with the angel of the Lord with the sword in his hand, a reference again, probably, to our Lord Jesus Christ, who before the incarnation manifested himself in these ways. So, here we have a similar thing. Verse 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.’ 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.’ So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. 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. 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.’ 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. [In Chronicles, we are told he also offered him grain, which would be used for the meal offerings as well.] All these, O king, Araunah has given to the king.’ And Araunah said to the king, ‘May the Lord, your God, accept you.’ 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. 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.”

Notice carefully that the plague is stayed as a result of the offerings of the sacrifices.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our father, we give Thee thanks for the ministry of the word of God to us. Lord, where would we be if we did not have the inspired Scriptures, which have been given to us to point the way, to the knowledge of our great Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through whom and through whose ministry we have come to know the forgiveness of sins in the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for the bounty that is ours as a result of all that the Son of God, the second person of the eternal trinity, as accomplished in his life, his ministry of death, burial and

resurrection, and in his ministry of continual prayer as our great high priest at Thy right hand.

How blessed we are. We give Thee thanks, Lord, for all that is ours in Christ. We pray for the whole Church of Jesus Christ, today, and wherever believers are gathering together or have gathered together, we pray Thy blessing upon them. May the ministry of the truth be edifying for them.

We pray for our country; for our president; for others associated with him in authority, and for the other governments under which we live. We pray for each one of them. We remember the Scriptures, which remind us that our public figures are ministers of God. They serve under Thee often, not knowingly, but nevertheless, in the sovereign good pleasure of God. They are Thy servants. We pray for all of them.

And we pray, particularly, Lord, ask for those who have requested our prayers, who are ill, who are sick, who are troubled for various reasons. We bring them before Thee; we pray Thy blessing upon them. Give encouragement and comfort and give consolation to some who are finding it very difficult to entrust themselves to Thee, O God. Undertake for each of them and for their families.

Now, we pray Thy blessing upon us as we sing, as we listen to exposition of the word of God and may Thy blessing be upon each one of us as we continue in this service.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] It does not matter, how important we are, what our accomplishments have been, what people think of us, what people have come to expect of us, but all of us, as I'm sure all of us know, are potentially guilty of the kind of folly that is manifested in King David's life.

The subject for today is “The Follies of the Favored” and David was surely a favored man. The numbering of Israel by David is one of the mysterious incidents of his

life and, in fact, it's one of the mysterious incidents of the Bible. You might not gather that if you are not familiar with 1 Chronicles chapter 21, because we read here, “Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.” But in 1 Chronicles chapter 21, we read, “Now Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.” So the narrator of 2 Samuel tells us that it was God who moved against David and moved against the children of Israel. But in 1 Chronicles, it is stated that Satan moved David to number the people.

Now, we know David sinned because he confesses his sin, and confesses it more than once, but the question is, how did he sin? What was his sin? And why did he sin? The incident illustrates, I believe, the dangers of success to careless minds, swelled by the sense of their own importance. You remember that in the Book of Proverbs in the 6th chapter, I believe it is, the writer of the Proverbs has something to say about the things that God does not like, in fact, God hates. And in Proverbs chapter 6 in verse 16, we read, “There are six things that the Lord hates, yea seven are an abomination to him; A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among his brethren.” And, heading the list is a “proud look.” And one, as he reads this chapter and thinks about King David, tends, I think, to think of this as probably the reason for David's mistake or sin in numbering the children of Israel.

One of the commentators has headed a chapter on this as “His final folly.” Well, it's not his final folly because on his deathbed he makes some statements that could hardly be called wise statements. But this, surely, was a folly. And it illustrates the fact that any one of us, no matter how high we may have risen, easily fall.

Just this past week in *The New York Times* on the front page, a lengthy article, not only on the front page but then continued on one of the other pages, concerning a well-known public figure from the West in the United States, a professing Christian man, known by that profession, known widely in the United States, a former speaker of special

occasion at Dallas Theological Seminary. And now, his career of about four lengthy sessions in Congress is beginning to fall apart, the man who because of his relationship to religious things has actually been called Saint Mark. That's not his name that was given to him by others, Saint Mark. I don't know, of course, the facts of the case except the article is a lengthy treatment of the ways in which there may have been some special interests that should not have been followed through by the Senator. But, nevertheless, it illustrates the fact that no matter how high we may be, no matter how faithfully we may have lived at one point of our life, every one of us, I speak for myself, every one of us is capable of falling at any moment.

This chapter provides, also, on another more favorable note, a more pleasant note, a very suggestive and revealing way to the distinguishing sinning saints from sinning unbelievers. Sinning unbelievers tend to make excuses. But sinning saints, truly saintly sinners, often turn and should turn every time, in confession and repentance or repentance and confession to the Lord God and that, we find the great king doing.

Now, this is a chapter with a lot of things in it. It touches such things as the sovereignty of God and responsibility of man; it touches such things as the immutability of God and how is it possible for God to affirm that something is to take place and then to repent concerning it. And so the repentance of God is another one of the questions that arises here. And we'll not be able to handle of those things in detail, of course, but I hope you will have a little sympathy as we try to run through what the chapter lays stress upon and perhaps offer a word or two that may be of help regarding those things.

The first part of the chapter in the first nine verses describes the numbering of Israel. David is successful. He's famous. The text has said a few chapters back that his fame has gone all over the land. And now, he orders a census of the fighting men. Now, it's not wrong to order a census. In the Book of Numbers, two censuses have been taken and there is no indication in the word of God that it was wrong to do that. But, in this case, something evidently is wrong and David recognizes it as being wrong, as well.

Different explanations have been given in order to express possibilities of blame. For example, some have suggested that he, as 1 Chronicles chapter 27 in 23 and 24 that his sin lay in numbering those who were under twenty years old. That does not seem to apply definitely to this. Others have concluded from the same passages, that he erred in numbering the people at all; and that his acts sprang from unbelief in the promises to the patriarchs. Because God had told the patriarchs that he would make Israel like the sand on the seashore in number. So why be concerned to number them at this time? Others thought he was guilty of presumption. He acted without any instruction from the Lord. We do not have any word that says God said to David, “Number the children of Israel.” And so, consequently, some have thought that that was the reason.

Others have felt the fault lay in his failure to require the half-shekel, which was required in case of a census. And the half-shekel was to be paid by each individual in token of their indebtedness to the Lord. It was a ransom price to remind them that they belonged to the Lord, by virtue of God, himself, purchasing them when the children of Israel were brought out of the land of Egypt, suggestive to us of the fact that we belong to God, only because of the ransom of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, no one, I don't think, can speak with absolute certainty but it appears to me that the reason that David ordered the census was, perhaps, related to his pride of heart. He is a mighty man, a well-known man. He has, again, managed to attain the throne. There is relative calm in the land. And David, perhaps, afflicted by that which many would be afflicted by, the sense of his greatness, intoxicated a bit with his successes asks for the numbering of the people. And that's the sense that Joab puts upon it, because he 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?” So, he saw it as something along those lines.

The Lord, evidently, was the mover in this case because Israel had rebelled against the anointing of David and they had rebelled, therefore, against the government of God.

Some other things had happened, and so the Lord had moved to bring discipline and chastisement to the land and Satan became the instrument just as in Job, the 1st chapter, when God chastised Job, Satan was the permitted instrument by God to carry out the discipline of the patriarch. So the people are the object of the anger of God, but David is involved, also.

Joab's response is rather interesting because it's not often that Joab, as we've seen in our long series on the Life of David, is the voice of good sense and moderation. In fact, Joab has been just the opposite. But in this case, he is the voice of good sense. He senses aspirations after self-sufficiency by David. And it was merciful of God to have a man like Joab by his side, who said a word of reproof. That, men, is why we're married, we have someone by our side to give us reproof. Now, David had his seer. His name was Gad. He had his prophet. I have my prophet or my seer in my wife, and she is the reason, if there is any reason, why I make a decision that is right. [Laughter] And so it's merciful of God, you know, to have someone by us who knows us well enough to say, "You shouldn't do that." Now, probably, many of you have not made as many mistakes as I have. But I am thankful that I have someone who is willing to say, "You shouldn't do that."

And when you get to be an old man, and David is getting to be an old man now, he's about seventy years of age. You know the five B's of old age; baldness, bursitis, bifocals, bulges that's the nice word for belly, and bunions. And if you look at those five things and you can probably think of some more bridges, for example, might be put in there, brains is not one of them. [Laughter] And so when you get old it's entirely possible that you are missing what you may have had when you were younger. But it illustrates the fact that neither age nor experience is a sure defense against Satan, and in David's case, that is true.

I think also this illustrates divine sovereignty in human responsibility in this way. God had sovereignly anointed David as king. He had sovereignly guided him. He had

sovereignly kept him in authority. He had permitted him to be driven out of the country, but he had brought him back in his sovereign power. And at the same time, there is Joab, right by his side, who causes him to stand up to his human responsibility. These two great doctrines are brothers in the Bible; divine sovereignty everything “God works all things according to the counsel of his own will,” the Apostle Paul states. But, at the same time, the Scriptures just as plainly tell us that we are responsible. “The Son of Man goeth as it has been written concerning him.” Divine sovereignty. “But woe unto that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed.” Human responsibility. So, we keep those things in mind.

Pilate was the determined instrument for the handing over of the Lord Jesus Christ for the crucifixion. But Pilate, though the determined instrument for doing that, himself must face judgment because, if you’ll remember, in the midst of the negotiations, in the midst of his relationship to the Lord, his wife had a dream. And she sent word to him and said, “Pilate, have nothing to do with this just man,” because God had spoken to her. And now, Pilate receives the word and so while he is the sovereign and determined instrument through whom the Lord is handed over, he is responsible because of the voice of the Lord through his wife that came to him; his “Gad,” his seer, who spoke to him.

Now, David, high on the idea that his strength lay in himself, this is a man, incidentally, who in the 27th Psalm in the first verse, makes such statements as “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” Now, he’s fallen into the human pattern of thinking that his strength lies within himself; he is erring in act and in manner, if he should have asked for the half-shekel, nine months of unease and deception, for cause it took over nine months for the census to be taken.

I’m sure as we read these two chapters; it’s evident that God had been chiding him because of his decision. And under the displeasure of God then and the chiding of

his heart, he's brought to the confession of his sin. And we read that confession in verse 10, “And David's heart condemned him.”

The Hebrew text is very vivid. David's heart “smote him,” *na'ach*. “Smote him.” And the Authorized Version renders it that way, and I like that a little better than “condemned.” To “smite” something is sudden and powerful; and that's what comes to David. “And David's heart smote 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.’”

Isn't it interesting that in the Scriptures, sin is folly and righteousness is wisdom? One can see it here. He says that he has sinned and he has sinned very foolishly. But look at verse 17. He says, “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly.” So the sinning is wickedly sinning and it's foolishly sinning. So sin and folly are bound up together. And righteousness and wisdom are bound up together, as well.

You know, when you look at this confession, you cannot help but think, and I speak for myself and I know many of you believers in this auditorium, O, the distinguishing mercy of God, which he exercises toward his saints. Paul said that, “The goodness of God leads one to repentance.” And here is a saint of God, sinning greatly, as he says, but God brings him to repentance and to confession. And how marvelous it is when God, through the Holy Spirit, does bring conviction to us and, in a sense, reaches down into the center of our hearts and forces out the word of confession before him of our sin. There's the great difference between the regenerate and the empty professors and the hypocrites. Hezekiah sinned and then sinned, but finally humbled himself before the Lord marking him out as a regenerate man.

When Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, what happened? Well, Adam did what men do who are un-regenerate, and he was un-regenerate at the time, he blamed it on his wife. And what did his wife do? Well, she was not yet the kind of seer or prophet

she should have been to him, she blamed it on the serpent. And all Bible teachers, of course, add, and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. [Laughter]

Well, that is a characteristic of us; we want to look around to blame someone for our sin. David, I admire him for this, it cost him a great deal to say to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done; and now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

Now, at this point, Gad, sent by God, comes to him and offers a multiple choice question. We had a very interesting lesson from Dr. Daniel on questions last Wednesday night. And here, David is faced with one of these questions. It's obvious that discipline is necessary and so, God offers him three alternatives.

He says to him, “Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land?” Or number two, “Shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you?” Or thirdly, “Shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me.”

There was a reason for this, of course. We don't have to belabor that point. God wanted to bring David to his senses, so that he would realize exactly what has happened. He wanted to humble him. He wanted to upbraid him for his pride. He wanted to grant him some encouragement, at the same time, under the chastisement. And he gave him the power to decide which of these three things he would choose. He wanted to enable him to more patiently endure the rod of discipline; since it was one of his own choosing. And, perhaps, he wanted to see if David would patiently endure this and, perhaps, we could sum it all up by saying God wanted to try the heart of his great servant and give opportunity for the exhibition and exercise of faith.

At any rate, David has forsaken the fountain of wisdom and so he must follow a course that even the common sense of the unregenerate avoided. Job would have avoided, an unregenerate man, probably. But David, the saint, is following a path that even the unregenerate would not follow. That's to illustrate that the saints, the true saints,

the true believers, the true Christians are capable of falling as well, and often falling even more suddenly and failingly than people who are not even believers.

We are individuals indwelt by the sin principle and as long as we're in the flesh it is possible. When the world looks at Christians and says Christians claim to be Christians, their idea because they are not enlightened their idea is that Christians are claiming to be righteous and holy in their inmost being and in their actions, almost entirely. And so the world loves to point the finger at Christians and say, “Ah, he sinned. Ah, he embarrassingly has sinned.” But Christianity has never said that Christians are without sin. Christianity has never said anything more than that the sin principle still dwells within us. And it is the work of the Holy Spirit who has come to indwell us, to edify us, and strengthen us and to sanctify us, and our lives over so many years is an evidence of how hard it is even for the Holy Spirit to bring us to a measure of conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians are still sinners. As Martin Luther put it, “We are still sinners, but justified.” Justified by what Christ has done.

Now, the answer of David is proof that David has recovered his sanity because he says, “Please, let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and do not let me fall into the hand of man.” That's proof David has recovered a measure of his sanity; that's a wise decision. It's wise because to be in the hands of the Lord, as a saint, he is the recipient of the mercy and grace of God. And God's strange work of judgment, as the Prophet Isaiah calls it, is moderated by his compassion.

One of the more liberal interpreters of the Old Testament has put what David did in very striking words. Let me read them to you. You might be surprised to know that this is from Gerhard von Rad, one of the outstanding Old Testament scholars, but one who was not so far as I know the member of any evangelical church. He said, “David did what was quite unexpected; but precisely in so doing, he flung himself through the thick curtain of the divine anger directly on God's heart.” And so, “I'm greatly distressed over

this,” David said. “Don’t let me fall into the hands of men. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are great.” And that’s what happened.

And then we read this word, “relented” in verse 16. We read, “So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel from the morning till the appointed time,” and seventy thousand people died. That’s startling, isn’t it? Seventy thousand people. But remember, it was not simply David’s numbering. The people had rebelled against the anointing by God of David as king, and so the seventy thousand is not simply for the census but for Israel’s lengthy disobedience of the Lord.

And so we read in verse 16, “And when the angel stretched out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented,” or repented, “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.

How can we say that God said that he would do these three things and then we read that he repented; he relented? Well, that, of course, suggests to us the difficulty of harmonizing the immutability of God with changes in his actions toward men. When we read in Scripture that he repented himself, he is speaking to us in human language, first of all. Many of the greatest of our theologians have made that point and, I think, it’s absolutely true. Let me show you how that is true; and I’ll just draw another, or some other parallels. The Bible employs a lot of anthropomorphisms; that is, statements about God’s actions in human language, human terms, human figures. For example, the Bible says that God is wearied, Isaiah chapter 42.

And, yet, in another place we are told that the Creator fadeth not, neither is weary. In one place the language is the language of men; in the other, we have the truth about God. In Deuteronomy, Jehovah speaks as “fearing the wrath of the enemy,” which is manifestly a figure of speech. He doesn’t fear anyone; he’s absolutely fearless. And even his saints have no fear as they rest in him. In Psalm 78, we read, “The Lord awakened, as one out of a sleep.” But we know, as we read the Old Testament that he neither

slumbers nor sleeps. Jeremiah speaks of him as “rising early in the morning.” Can you figure, or put in your mind, the Lord lying in a bed and throwing aside the covers and getting up in his pajamas, and saying, “Now, I think I’ll look and see what’s been happening on the earth while I’ve been sleeping,” and awakening early? No. He rises early? That’s a figure of speech, speaking as men to denote his earnestness in doing what he is going to do. And so on.

So when we read that God relented or God repented; we are talking about what God does in the language of men. God is immutable, like the seasons; summer, fall, winter, spring. Like the law of gravity. Like Charlie Brown’s failures. Like a wife’s nagging, so the Proverb says. Or like Calvin, not John Calvin, I know you would think I would say something about John Calvin, but I’m avoiding the name today, but like Calvin and Hobbes, like the Calvin of Calvin and Hobbes; his orneriness. That’s always present. That’s immutable in that cartoon.

And so what about immutability and repentance? Well, let’s think just for a moment about immutability. When we say God is unchangeable, or immutable, we mean he’s immutable in his essence. He can have no new attributes. He’s exalted above all “becoming.” He is immutable in his will; he’s infinite in wisdom and therefore, there can be no error in the conception of his plans; infinite in power, there is no failure in their accomplishment. So he cannot change because his being is from himself; not from someone else. A change for God would be from either that which is bad to that which is better or that which is better to that which is worse, or if we assume moral stability, from immaturity to maturity. But all reasons for change are lacking in God. He’s not dependant on anyone. There’s no error of mind that he, himself, is guilty of. There is no inconstancy of purpose that he has. In fact, what we read then is simply an expression of his general laws. If there is no change in man, he is immutable in carrying out his purpose. But if man changes because he has determined elsewhere that if men act in a

certain way, he will respond in a certain way. And in this case, David’s actions changed. And God acted according to his principles and carried them out.

Let me illustrate by the thermometer. We put a thermometer on the side of the wall and we look at it and in one way we could say that the thermometer is very changeable. One day, well in Texas it’s 110. The next day, it’s cooled off to 102. And, sometime in the wintertime it might be 5 or 10. The thermometer is very changeable we might think. But, actually, the thermometer is unchangeable. It acts according to certain principles that are true of thermometers. And so we can speak of it as changeable or we can speak of it as unchangeable. God is unchangeable in his essence. He’s unchangeable in his purposes. He’s unchangeable in carrying them all out. But he has also stated as his purpose, that if man acts in a certain way, he will respond in a certain way. And David has responded in the confession, in the repentance and the confession of his sin.

And so David prays that great prayer of wisdom. Wisdom follows folly in his case. And there are three steps in it. He was smitten. His heart is wounded. That is, he has repented. He has made confession because he has owned his sin; it’s his sin. It’s not somebody else’s. And then, he prays for the removal of the consequences. Now, the removal of the consequences are due to the sovereign determination of the Lord God. He may remove consequences; he may not.

The man who hits the bottle for thirty or forty years and then finds Christ as his Savior; after repentance and confession, will most likely find that his body has deteriorated to the place that he will suffer the consequences of his sin, in the midst of his acknowledgment of his sin, confession, repentance, and in the joy of the knowledge of sins forgiven.

Now, the final part of the chapter is so important, it’s unfortunate I have only a few minutes to say something about it. But God sends word to David that he’s to erect an altar. And I’d like for you to notice, first of all, that it’s God who sends Gad to David to

tell him to erect the altar. The plan of divine redemption is something that proceeds from God, first of all. That’s why we say, salvation is of the Lord. That determines all theology; salvation is of the Lord.

And so Gad is sent. David, “Erect an altar and offer sacrifices upon it.” And in the course of it, he makes that great statement to Araunah, “I will not offer that which costs me nothing.” Cheap religion is repudiated. Everything belongs to the Lord God. We are just stewards. And so he wishes to give as God gives. And we wish to give, incidentally, in the Christian Church, because Jesus Christ is the great example of the giver, the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. That’s why no Christian should ever have to be exhorted to give. Isn’t it strange? Today we live in the day of solicitation and exhortation. It’s sad, very sad. To give as the Lord gives is the noblest use of our possessions. People didn’t follow the Lord Jesus saying, “Give yourself up on the Cross. Give yourself up on the Cross for us.” This was something that proceeded from the mind of God. And true giving flows out of gratitude for what Christ has done.

Let me tell you this, my Christian friend, the bountiful soul is always rich. And so, David is told to erect the altar. He erects the altar. It’s God’s idea. He erects it as his own work of faith, offers sacrifices upon the altar. There is propitiation; the offerings are accepted and the plague is stayed.

Nothing could be a clearer illustration of the fact that there is no forgiveness of sins unless the justice and holiness of God is satisfied. Why is it necessary for an altar to be erected? Why cannot an individual just repent and say, “I repent of my sin. I confess my sin.” Why is it necessary for God to arrange a way of forgiveness through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ? Why is it necessary? Well, my Christian friend and my non-Christian friend, if you are here, the reason is very simple; God is not only a god of love, but he’s a just and righteous God as well. And because he is, his own nature requires that his holiness and righteousness be satisfied by the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the Lord Jesus Christ offers himself as the sacrifice, sacrifice to the holiness and

righteousness of God, satisfying Him and freeing God, who is a righteous God as well as a loving God, to give eternal life to those who have been convicted by the Holy Spirit of their own sin and desire the forgiveness of sins.

I wish it were possible to speak further about this but, let me just intimate one or two things, so you'll understand how one could speak about it. The offerings that David offered do have some resemblance to the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ. But they also show the incalculable superiority of our Lord's sacrifice. David offered the lives of animals; our Lord offered himself. David provided his own sacrifices; Jesus was God's sacrifice, the gift of God. The moral significance of the sacrifice of Christ is immeasurably greater than the offering of any number of animal sacrifices. The efficacy of the sacrifice transcends incalculably that of the sacrifices offered by David because the value of David's sacrifices depended wholly on the will and appointment of God. They were worthless except that they had been commanded by God. Whereas, the worth of our Lord's sacrifice is essential; the divine person possess human nature, the divine person. So, it is essential and intrinsic. The one atonement is limited, for a time. The other is boundless and its efficacy is eternal. The sacrifices of David arrested a pestilence and thus lengthened the lives of many in the land. But Christ's sacrifice saves from eternal punishment and secures eternal life.

There are many other things we could say about this. I'm sorry that we do not have time, but if you are here and you do not know our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, it's the great privilege of the ambassador of the Lord Jesus to remind you of the Cross of Calvary, God's great altar, where the sacrifice for sin was made and where forgiveness and a full and free, and eternal salvation is offered to those who, as they examine themselves, realize that they stand under the judgment of God because God requires as he says, perfect obedience. And if you cannot render to him perfect obedience, you need a redeemer, and the Lord Jesus is the provided redeemer.

May God in his wonderful grace so touch your heart that you turn to him.

Let's stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these great incidents in the life of the great king. The great king whose son, the son of David, would ultimately come and do what the great king could never have done; provide a ransom for our souls. O God, if there are some in this audience who have not yet turned to Christ, so touch them, that they see themselves as they are, and enable them to turn to Thee within their own heart in repentance, confession, forgiveness, and the joy of the possession of early salvation.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.