

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: II Samuel 24

DATE: August 30th, 2020

LOCATION: Auditorium (Bill)

SERMON: The Hands of the LORD

(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller for various sermons on the life of David.)

Good morning Five Forks Church, glad to be with those of you who have come out this morning, and glad to be joined by those who you who are tuning in to the live stream.

This morning we come to the conclusion of our August Sermon Series called **Make or Break**, as we've been looking at a number of different things that can either make us or break us as we look to follow Jesus.

I'd like to begin by asking you this question: Have you ever had to sit before someone...or before a group...and have them make a decision regarding some aspect of your future?

When Karen and I were in the process of adopting Olivia, we had to meet with a number of different individuals or groups – both here in the United States and in Guatemala – in order to gain their approval and move forward.

Maybe you've had similar experiences...perhaps when you interviewed for a job or for a promotion where the decision lied in the hands of one or more individuals. If so, what were some of your thoughts going in? You hoped to make a good impression...you hoped that whoever was interviewing you was having a good day...You hoped they weren't someone you picked on back in school. Having our fate reside in the hands of men and women can be a bit unsettling.

How about knowing that our eternal fate resides in **The hands of the Lord?**

This is the title of this morning's message...words spoken by David when he said...

II Samuel 24:14b “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great...

David was in trouble, as we're about to see, but he knows that the Lord is merciful, and so he places himself in God's hands. What I really want us to focus on this morning is God's **Mercy**. It's my hope that throughout this morning and beyond, you will find yourself grateful that today, tomorrow, and all the days to come...your fate lies in the hands of the Lord, whose mercy is great.

Throughout this series we've been looking at a number of events that transpire in the life of David and this morning is no exception. Please open up your Bible, get out your device, or follow along on the screen as we head to **II Samuel chapter 24** where we see the reason for David's distress. As you make your way there, as you know by now, every week we ask the same three questions: **What's Happening?...What's Noteworthy?...What's Your Next Step?**

So let's take a look at...

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING?

What we see here in II Samuel 24 is both complicated and wonderful, and I wanted to make sure we looked at this event at some point during this series.

The complications begin with the very first verse when it says that the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and so He incited David to...

II Samuel 24:1b “...go and take a census of Israel and Judah.”

This seems complicated because as we will soon see, David is wrong for doing this. So why would God incite David to do something wrong? It's further complicated due to another account of this event found in I Chronicles 21 where it says that Satan was the one who incited

David to take this census. The original language actually uses the word “adversary”...and so we have God, we have Satan, and we have an adversary, who granted, is usually translated as Satan.

So it’s a bit complicated and biblical scholars have different views on this...but what seems clear is that David is wrong for doing this. As soon as David told his commander to go...

II Samuel 24:2b “...and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.”

...the commander responded by saying, “*Why does the Lord my King want to do such a thing?*” He knows this isn’t right, but David overrules him and the men are enrolled. It took 10 months, but when it was all said and done...

II Samuel 24:10 David was conscience stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done.”

The Lord called upon a prophet whose name was Gad to go to David with a message.

II Samuel 24:13 So Gad went to David and said to him, “Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land?”

God gives David 3 options...and he is told to think it over and come to a decision. Listen carefully to what David says here...

II Samuel 24:14-16a David said to Gad, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.”

So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy-thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, “Enough! Withdraw your hand.”

So the Lord stays the hand of the angel just as he is about to destroy the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Now don't miss this because it's important....

II Samuel 24:16b The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

This may not seem like much...simply telling us that the angel is at this threshing floor of an obscure man. But we will come back and talk about why this is significant in just a bit. It was at this moment that David looked up and saw the angel...the account found in I Chronicles tells us that that the angel has a drawn sword in his hand, extended towards the city of Jerusalem.

II Samuel 24:17 When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family."

And so the angel told David to build an altar right there on the threshing floor owned by this man, this Jebusite named Araunah. David did so, and there he sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.

II Samuel 24:25b Then the LORD answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

That's a lot happening in this final chapter, is it not? And so with all of this going on...

2. WHAT'S NOTEWORTHY?

How about if we start by addressing...

A. The Murky Parts

Not only do we have the complicated opening verse, but there are a number of things that we read about here that has scholars all over the place. For me, the murky parts revolve around **David's sin and God's judgment.**

It all begins when David goes to his army commander and gives him this instruction:

II Samuel 24:2b “Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.”

What’s so wrong about that? Hundreds of years earlier, before the Israelites entered into the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to count the men in Israel who were at least 20 years old who are able to serve in the army.

And yet here we see that David is conscience stricken after he essentially does the same thing. I wouldn’t blame any of you for asking, “*Why was it okay for Moses, but not okay for David?*”

Here’s one possibility to consider: Many scholars believe that up to this point, Israel had what might be called a “Part Time” army. When you were attacked, you would bring the army out, men coming from throughout Israel, and they defended. There might be times when Israel would be the aggressor, but again, the men would come together from different regions for such an occasion.

Many believe that up to this point Israel never had a “Full-Time” army...or what would be called **a Standing Army**. But it seems as if David is putting one together, as he’s not just counting the men as Moses did...he is enrolling them. The original language says that David was “appointing” them.

The problem with Standing Armies is that when you have them, you may feel compelled to use them. And it’s easy for aggression to take on a more prominent role.

And so as I’m reading what others are saying, I’m asking myself, is this what would have happened if God had not intervened? And it’s His intervention that brings up another difficult part of this passage: Verse 15...

II Samuel 24:15 So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy-thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died.

Clearly a difficult part. So here is God, angry at sin, smiting tens of thousands of people, and it's passages like this one that causes some people so say, *"You know, I just can't believe in a God who does this sort of thing...who judges people and smites people."*

I get this, you get this, we all get this, right? And so how do we reconcile it other than saying, *"Well, we don't like it, but we accept this is how God would operate from time to time in the Old Testament."*

There is this, though...one thing that might surprise you, when we read in the Old Testament of God judging a city or judging a nation, many times, not every time, but many times, it is a response to human violence.

The flood for example, in **Genesis 6** is God responding to human violence. *(Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. Genesis 6:11)*

When Jonah went to **Ninevah** and called on that city to repent or else receive God's judgment, they were told to give up their violence. *(Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Jonah 3:8b)*

Have you ever read the first chapter of Amos where God passes judgement on Israel's neighbors?

One neighbor, ***"Because she took captive whole communities...I will send fire."***

Another neighbor: ***"Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion...I will send fire."***

Yet another neighbor: ***"Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders...I will send fire."***

Those are just a few of the examples, as throughout the Old Testament God's judgement is never on a whim, but is actually a response to human violence.

How do we account for 70,000 Israelites losing their lives in this plague? Perhaps the primary thing that is wrong here is that David is taking Israel down a path of building up the military and using it for aggression and violence towards others...and perhaps God is saying, *“David, I don’t want you to be like other nations, and I’m not going to let you go there.”*

I can’t claim to know for certain all that is taking place here, but what I think we all can agree on is that there are some murky parts here in this chapter. At the same time, there are what I’ll call...

B. The Clear Parts

These “clear” parts are found in David’s response, specifically **David’s confession, recognition, and offer.**

Look at verse 10, and see David’s **confession.**

II Samuel 24:10 David was conscience stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done.”

Are you familiar with David’s sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah...how the prophet Nathan had to come and confront him directly in order for David to see his sin?

Totally different what we see here...there is no prophet, no judgment, no negative consequences up to this point and yet David is conscience stricken. And so what we see here...is progress.

If you think that as a person grows closer and closer to Jesus he or she confesses less, you’re wrong. I shared last week about how I begin each day just taking a walk and talking with Jesus and listening for Jesus to talk to me. I began taking these walks this past November, and it’s led to more confessing than I had ever done before.

One part of my walk includes a look back over the previous day, I can picture which house I’m in front of when I get to this part of the conversation. I reflect back on the things I did, the

words I spoke, the attitude of my heart...it's a time of confession and repentance. And not only can I tell you the house I'm in front of when this starts, I can tell you that the things I need to confess are almost always connected to my selfishness, my self-centeredness...this tendency I have to put myself first.

And so I have found that the closer I walk with Jesus, the more I recognize the need for confession and repentance. Wouldn't you agree that every person who is a follower of Jesus should take time each day to reflect back and ask God's Spirit to bring to light anything that needs to be confessed? And yet I wonder how many who truly desire to follow Jesus do not allow for God's Spirit to do this critically important thing?

The great thing is, if you can begin doing this, it won't be a confession and a repentance that leaves you miserable. Because you're following Jesus, it will bring a release...this weight just being lifted off of you. And will draw you closer to Jesus, because you know He's not about condemnation, but about liberation. Setting you free so you can truly live.

Back to our passage, we clearly see David's confession...in verse 24 we also see David's **recognition.**

II Samuel 24:14b Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men."

You won't find many examples of this in the Scriptures, but do you remember how God gave David three options? Granted, none that David would find appealing. 3 years of famine, 3 months of running from enemies, or 3 days of plague. At first we might assume that he picked the last one because it was the shortest. But that's not it, is it?

With the first two options, his fate would have been in the hands of men... 3 years of famine which would have weakened the nation to the point of being overrun by their enemies...or fleeing from enemies for 3 months.

David recognizes that if your fate lies in the hands of men, all bets are off. Anything can happen, and many times, not good. But while this third option – 3 days of plague - isn't ideal,

at least he and all of Israel will have their fate in the hands of the Lord, who David knows to be merciful.

So, looking at things that seem quite clear: David's confession, David's recognition, and one more thing: **David's offer**. We're told in verse 17 that...

II Samuel 24:17 ...David saw the angel who was striking down the people...

There is actually another book of the Bible, I Chronicles chapter 21 which also describes this event, and we are told that David saw the angel standing "***with a drawn sword extending over Jerusalem.***" (*I Chronicles 21:16b*)

A drawn sword. And when David saw this angel with the sword extended towards Jerusalem,...

II Samuel 24:17 When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, **he said to the LORD, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family."**

When David says, "These are but sheep"...he's saying, "*I'm their king, I'm the shepherd, and I am the one most responsible for this. Let your hand fall upon me, and spare the sheep.*"

David's offering is a bit of foreshadowing, isn't it? And so God, rather than taking David's life, tells him to build an altar there on Araunah's threshing floor where David had seen the angel of the Lord. It is here that David will offer a sacrifice, the shed blood of an animal that for now, God will accept.

But...in the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews we are told, as some of you know, that the blood of an animal can never deal with the sin in this world. And so what's really going on here? This brings us to...

C. The Best Part

Recall when David made his decision, choosing the 3rd option and saying to the prophet, ***“Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great...”***

This is the best part of today’s passage...God’s mercy. What is mercy exactly? For me, it means not getting what I deserve.

I talked earlier about the risk involved when some aspect of our future lies in the hands of a person or a group of people. When my current term as Pastor is up in a few years, whether I serve an additional term lies in your hands and ultimately in the hands of the Church Board.

How about if my eternal fate was in your hands, and you had to base it on an awareness of God’s holy standard? I would be in serious trouble, because those of you who know me well have seen that I do not measure up. You have seen me act in ways and speak in ways that are selfish and self-centered, and if you presented me with specific examples of what you have seen, I would have nothing to offer other than to say, *“It’s worse than you know.”*

You’ve only observed some of it, but God sees it all, and so why would I – why would anyone – want to fall into the hands of the Lord?

Mercy.

David sums it up nicely in Psalm 103:10 where he writes...

Psalm 103:10 “He does not treat us as our sins deserve...”

This is mercy.

8:00: One of my favorite songs is called Mercy, written by Matt Redman.

10:30: In just a few moments we’ll be singing these words about God’s mercy:

“I will kneel in the dust at the foot of the Cross, where mercy paid for me. Where the wrath I deserve, it is gone, it has passed, Your blood has hidden me.”

I want to share with you a little passage found In II Chronicles that ties in directly with today's passage, and is going to help us clearly see the extent of God's mercy. II Chronicles 3:1 says...

II Chronicles 3:1 Then Solomon (this is David's son) began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite...

Isn't that interesting? Remember, it was on this threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite that David saw the angel of the Lord with his sword extended toward Jerusalem. Solomon will be building the temple on this piece of ground someday. But this verse reveals something else...this threshing floor (and eventually the temple) was located on what was known as Mount Moriah.

Besides the fact that the temple is being built here, there are two very significant events that occur on Mount Moriah, centuries apart.

The one event we've been looking at this morning. The third option – the option David chose was 3 days of plague, and it's in its third day. And while it is while it is *near* the end, but it has not yet *reached* the end. Jerusalem has not yet been touched, but this is about to change...

II Samuel 24:16 When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand."

And after that David offered up a sacrifice, and the dying came to an end. This was one of the events. But what else happened on Mount Moriah?

Centuries before, we read in Genesis how Abraham stood on the top of Mount Moriah, with a knife in his hand and his arm outstretched over his only son, Isaac...and God said, "Enough. Withdraw your hand." And then God provided a sacrifice, a ram.

And so we have these two events, centuries apart, at the same location...Mount Moriah, which was in or around the city of Jerusalem. Two events, in or around Jerusalem, one where a sword, the other where a knife was drawn, but God in His mercy, said, "Enough." And provided a sacrifice.

Two events that point forward to a day, just outside of Jerusalem, when nails were drawn, and God in His mercy, did not say "Enough", but instead became the sacrifice...taking the nails through His hands and through His feet...felt the spear pierce His side. Taking upon Himself that which I deserve.

I will kneel in the dust, at the foot of the cross, where mercy paid for me. Where the wrath I deserve, it is gone, it has passed, your blood has hidden me.

This is mercy. God Himself – Jesus – **laying down His life** so that we do not get what we deserve. (*"He does not treat us as our sins deserve..." Psalm 103:10*).

And so...

3. WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

For some of you in here...watching out there...you do it by taking the step of **Placing your trust in Jesus and begin following Him**. You fall into His hands in other words.

David has shown you the way here in this passage...first, take a look into your heart and confess that you have fallen short of who God created you to be. It shouldn't be too hard to see. It takes self-awareness and also humility to be able to say like David, *"I have sinned greatly against the Lord."* Just remember, you're not alone, we're all in this together.

It also takes understanding, an awareness of God's mercy and what He is offering you. He's not looking to you to offer a sacrifice in the way of blood, but simply to receive the sacrifice – Jesus – His life in exchange for yours. Jesus died, so that you can live. And if you believe this, then trust Him and begin to follow Him, as many of us are already doing.

And for those of you who have put your trust in Jesus and are following Him, your next step will be our next step, as together, **We will lift up the cup and the bread we will break, remembering God's love.**

His love, His compassion, and this morning especially, His mercy.

For those times when I have focused more on my outward appearance rather than my **character**, I am grateful for His mercy.

For those times when I lacked the **courage** to say or do the right thing because I thought it would be too hard, I am grateful for His mercy.

For those times when I envied someone's success rather than **rejoicing** in their success, I am grateful for His mercy.

For those times when I have treated **the Presence of God** casually and seen His commands as optional, I am grateful for His mercy.

For any time, every time I have sinned against the Lord, I am grateful for His mercy.