

David Numbers the People

Call to Worship: Psalm 99:1-3

1st Scripture: 1 Chronicles 21:1-8

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 24:1-10

Hymn #678- *Christ Shall Have Dominion*

Hymn Insert- *Before the Throne of God Above*

Hymn #705- *Marvelous Grace of our Loving Lord*

Introduction:

We have seen, that for some undisclosed reason, the anger of the Lord, was again, aroused against Israel. And as a vehicle of bringing a heightened judgment against the people, God had moved David to number the people, by means of the wicked tactics of satan. And so, although Joab (along with the captains of the army of Israel) had sought to dissuade David from committing such a sinful act against God, David had rejected their counsel, and ordered that the people be numbered.

This morning, we will bring our attention to two important matters of consideration: First, we will seek to draw a sobering principle from Joab's overall response to David's command (to number the people). And second, we will ponder the conviction which comes upon David (and how he responds to that conviction), after he has the people numbered.

I. Joab's Response to David's Command

Brethren, let us begin then, by noting a profound principle that can be taken from Joab's response. As a general principle, the Scriptures teach us that whenever we are tempted by satan, God also provides a "way out" of that temptation, so that we are without excuse. In other words, we cannot make the claim that any temptation, which we undergo, is irresistible, beyond our control or unique to us.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13, we are told, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear/endure it."

Now, when David had succumbed to the temptation of pursuing Bathsheba, we recall that God sent a voice of reason to him, which was that very "way out." When David had inquired

about Bathsheba, we are told, "And someone said, 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite" (2 Sam. 11:3)? The red flag was raised! David was clearly informed that Bathsheba was off limits, belonging to a faithful soldier named Uriah, who was, unlike David, at this very moment, serving his country, out at war. And of course, David trampled over the red flag and sinned anyway. But, the "way out" was given right there, nonetheless.

Well, here again, God provides David with a way out, leaving David without excuse, even though God moved David to be susceptible to the temptation of satan, at the same time. In other words, brethren, David still had every resource necessary to make the right choice here, although he caters to the dictates of his flesh.

But consider God's "way out" here, brethren. Consider and take note of His "voice of reason," as it were. It's Joab! God bears His truth, by means of the insubordinate, ungodly, murderous Joab. Listen again, to Joab's plea to David:

In verse 3, we are told, "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?' And then, in verse 4, we are told, "Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army." Joab appealed to David not to number the people. And his appeal here, was far more gracious and honorable than some of the other times that he disagreed with the king. We remember how disgraceful and heartless Joab was toward David, when David had wept loudly over his son Absalom's death.

Consider the parallel text in 1 Corinthians 21:3, which adds more clarity to Joab's overall plea: "And Joab answered, 'May the Lord make His people a hundred times more than they are. But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then does my lord require this thing? *Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?*'"

And finally, after reluctantly numbering most of the people (eligible for war) in Israel, we are further told in 1 Chronicles 23:6, "But (Joab) did not count Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's word/command was abominable to Joab."

And so, we find here, that the normally graceless Joab has a good and honorable zeal for Israel, and a legitimate concern for how David's actions will bring about divine judgment upon

the nation. And he warns David to this end. The same Joab, who had wickedly murdered Abner and Amasa in cold blood; the same Joab, who had (against the orders of King David) killed the defenseless Absalom (when he was trapped, hanging in a tree by his hair); the same Joab, who had heartlessly, harshly threatened David, for wailing over Absalom, now offers sound, God honoring, Biblical counsel to David! And he despises David's sinful command, after being forced to go through with it. Now, what is the point in all of this?

Well, take at least two critical applications here:

1) Brethren, don't always, immediately discount or disregard the counsel of the ungodly, simply because they are ungodly. It could be easy for us to become defensive or to simply refuse to hear the voices of those, who are outside of Christ. But, you never know when the voice of reason, may come from even unsaved souls, who are yet, born in the image of God, like us. To be sure, not every philosopher only spoke falsehood. There is wisdom, even among the ungodly. Now, we must compare all that is said with Scripture, and clearly disregard all that contradicts the Scriptures; and we would do well to get our general counsel from Holy Spirit filled brethren, but, nonetheless, hear what people have to say, when they speak to you, and test it with the Scriptures. Even a broken clock is right two times a day. And even a war hungry, murderer can, at times, offer godly counsel. Recall when Shimei had sinfully and wrongfully cursed David, and how David had yet, received it from the Lord, though Shimei was unrighteous in his intentions. And so, as a general principle, always pursue biblical counsel, but at least examine what comes to you from the outside, particularly when you are not asking for it. [Ex: Especially an unsaved spouse or parent... etc -- "Well, you're not even saved!"]

2) Note as well, that even non-Christians can exhibit Christian behaviors, at times. To be sure, there are false sheep in the pail; sheep who would profess Christ to be their Savior, who, in the end, will hear the words, "Depart from Me, I never knew you," from Christ.

Before God truly worked a work of grace in my heart; before He brought me to repent of my sin, and to a sincere and authentic faith in Christ, I would have stated that I believed in God and Jesus. I would have said, "Yes, Jesus died for my sins." But, simply making a profession of faith, does not a Christian, make you. There are pro-life, morally upright people, who can give you some of the best arguments for creationism (refuting evolution at its core), who say many

things about Jesus, while not really knowing Him in truth. You see, in the end, the atheists; the muslims and the hindus, are not the ones who are going to say, "Lord, Lord, we did so many things in Your name." No, that is speaking about professing, church going Christians, who though they may have done many religious things, never really knew Christ in truth. They knew of Him, theoretically, as you and I know of Abraham Lincoln or George Washington, but they knew Him not relationally.

Christianity is not merely about cerebral knowledge of religious truths. It is a daily walk with the Lord, in His Word, in prayer, where the true child of God is undergoing a process of sanctification, working with the Holy Spirit to put sin to death, and to become more like Christ, the Author and Finisher/Perfector of our faith! Christianity embraces a biblical worldview that envelops all of life, and not merely Sunday mornings. It is to be born again with new hopes, new desires and new ideals. It entails a radical change! God removes the stony heart and replaces it with a heart of flesh, which now knows, loves and serves Christ! A verbal profession of faith in Christ is absolutely necessary, but it cannot stand on its own. The faith must be living and vibrant, lit on fire by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Joab could caution David, even expressing a fear of God in his caution, against numbering the people here. And yet, the same Joab can be eternally condemned, killed by Benaiah, at the command of Solomon, while clinging to the bronze altar within the tabernacle courts. And so, the profession of faith must line up with a heart that is near to God, if it is to mean anything. This does not entail perfection; it does not entail sinlessness, but it does entail entering a sobering battle against sin, striving to put sin to death, by the Holy Spirit! One cannot remain "lawless" and lay claim to Christ at the same time! Such hypocrisy will only hear these words from the Lord Jesus Christ, on that great and final Day of Judgment, "Depart from Me. I never knew you, you worker of lawlessness!"

Are you truly saved, this morning? Are you truly in Christ? Does your faith have a heartbeat? Or are you at best a Joab, a Judas Iscariot or a King Saul; knowing many things about God; indeed, living as an alleged disciple of Christ, but lawless at the core, and spiritually dead... close, but missing the boat completely! May God give us all the grace to be honest with ourselves and with God, so that we might be certain of our condition before God! [Repent... etc]

II. David's Conviction of Sin

Finally brethren, before we close, let us just consider a few things about the conviction, which David receives, over his sin.

At some point after David had had the people of Israel numbered (which took nine months and twenty days - 2 Sam. 24:8), we are told in 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.'"

And so, here we find that David, at some point after the numbering was completed, finds himself convicted of his sin, from within his own heart. And this conviction of sin, then leads David to take the appropriate actions, for dealing with his sin. Here again, we find that while God had removed His restraint, allowing David to be susceptible to the wicked temptation of satan, that David was still responsible for his sin. David did what his flesh naturally desired. And therefore, he is rightly convicted of his sin. But brethren, note three important facts concerning what we are told here:

1- David was convicted of his sin. Now brethren, this simple reality may seem like a small thing, but I want to highlight the fact that "conviction of sin" is a gracious blessing of God, which He grants to His true children. Now, this is not to say that everyone who is convicted of sin is saved... what happens beyond the conviction is telling as well. However, everyone who is truly saved will be convicted of their sins. And as painful as conviction may be, it is a critical means that God uses to restore His wayward children. [*May take months, but will come]

And so, brethren, let me just highlight here the grace of conviction. When David had sinned with Bathsheba, God used Nathan to convict David of his sin. Here, the Holy Spirit brings David's sin to bear, in his conscience, and he solidifies this conviction through the prophet Gad, as we will see next week, Lord willing. And by this, we learn that God, by His Spirit, uses His Word (written, in our case) to convict His children of their sins. And so, brethren, let us just note for a moment the blessed reality that God convicts us of our sins, so that He might restore us, through His grace. Those whom God loves, he doesn't leave in their sin. Rather, He chastises them, and scourges them, so that they might be partakers of His holiness.

King Saul felt no genuine remorse for his great offenses toward God, but King David was broken and brought to repentance, because the Holy Spirit was at work in him. Such is the reason that David could say, "Blessed is the man to whom God does not impute iniquity." Blessed are those whom God forgives, by way of conviction, leading to repentance and faith in the grace of God, offered and granted in Jesus Christ! [*Ex: Asaph - Psalm 73]

2) David's heart condemned/smote (KJV) him. To be sure, the conviction of sin, which David had received by God, produced this proper response. In a world that feeds on man "finding the best and the good within himself," it is hard to appreciate the blessing of recognizing that there is nothing, naturally good in us. We are a fallen race, and the best and most moral people in all the world are naturally repulsive in the sight of our holy God.

Here, David was able to be honest with himself. In fact, the very pride, which drove him to number the people from the outset was clearly torn down, right here, when his heart smote him. David did not make excuses. David did not blame his upbringing, his environment, society at large or anything else. He knew that "in sin, his mother had conceived him," and he abhorred the reality of that sin in him. He abased himself and grieved the extent to which he could fall; the low to which, he could travel. And because of this, he could confess his sin and seek cleansing, forgiveness and grace, outside of himself. And so, brethren, see the blessing of being among those, who are able to see and to face their own depravity. Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who find themselves bankrupt in their own righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of God. It is only when we see, acknowledge and confess the true brokenness of our naturally, fallen, pitiful condition... and that in specific terms (and not merely general terms); it is only then that we will be led to look outside of ourselves, unto the loveliness of Christ, where we will find refuge. Were not the religious leaders blind to this reality, and condemned because they failed to see their own depravity? Indeed, the way to grace is to self abase!

And then, if we own and confess our sins to God; if we come before God, desperate beggars, longing for His grace, He assures us that He is more than willing to give it to us freely and liberally. For, He will be faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The loveliness of Christ can be seen most clearly, in the backdrop of acknowledging our natural corruption. [*To the unbeliever... begin here!!!; conviction of sin

leads to self-abasement, which leads to desperately fleeing to Christ alone, which leads to eternal life!]

3) Finally brethren, while we can greatly rejoice in the free grace, which we are continually given in Christ, let us yet, war against sin and strive to put it to death. For although we may be delivered from the eternal consequences of our sin, at times, there will be immediate consequences. And those immediate consequences can be painful. We saw what had happened when David had sinned with Bathsheba. Indeed, he was forgiven, but look at the devastation his sin brought upon his life and family. And here again, we will find great temporal consequences -- indeed, much loss of life -- coming about, because of David's sin. Granted, God was already angry at the people, and He moved David to number the people, but David was still responsible for the consequences of his sin, which proceeded out of his own heart.

Never take sin to be a light matter. Sin is always destructive and must be treated like a lit fire in your home. You don't delay or dance around the fire, do you? No, you take pains to put that fire out, and to get your family to safety, immediately! Always be about killing sin, lest it kill you. [*PTL that we never get what we ultimately deserve, in Christ!!!]

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25