

A sacrifice costing nothing?

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[0 : 00] Let us turn together to that chapter that we read in 2 Samuel chapter 24, and in particular the words of verse, part of the words of verse 24, I will surely buy it of thee at a price, neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.

Seeking God's help, let us hear his word. I take this as my text, although it is the way in, I believe, to other things that we must consider in the setting.

Burnt offerings.

David also offered, verse 25 tells us, peace offerings. Offerings. Perhaps we are inclined when we read these words, and especially as here in the Old Testament, we maybe tend to think of the Old Testament sacrifice and sacrificial system, if we know anything of the Old Testament.

And we ought to know something of the Old Testament, especially in that area of offerings and sacrifices. We might tend to think of the offerings on an altar, as it was in that case.

[1 : 59] David was told to erect an altar. That was all he was told in so many words, but the rest followed. And we might tend to think of these sacrifices mostly, if not always, involving blood.

These were animals that were killed, and their blood was an important part of that. Let me just remind you, too, that in the book of Hebrews, in the New Testament era, the writer speaks of New Testament sacrifices.

He speaks in chapter 13 of offering to God continually a sacrifice of praise. And in the following verse, to do good and share with others.

With such sacrifices, God is well pleased. When David speaks here, refusing the offer of this Jebusite, Arunah, Arunah offers, he says, well, take what you want.

Don't pay anything, just take what you want. It's a good cause. But David remarks something here, and it explains what sacrifice is, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

[3 : 20] He says, I will not make an offering that doesn't cost me anything. And we know it, we use it in all sorts of ways, even in current culture.

Perhaps some people talk about salary sacrifice. You're giving up something. You don't have it to hand. It's costly. There are other sacrifices that people make, perhaps for their education, with a view to something that follows.

And so on. A sacrifice is when we give what costs us something, as David makes very plain there. And taking just very quickly those references in Hebrews, praise.

For you and for me, that is very costly, because we do not want, in our own hearts, we do not want to praise anyone else. We want the praise for ourselves.

But to offer praise to God is a pleasing sacrifice. Yes, it is a sacrifice. So, too, doing good and sharing with others.

[4 : 29] Is that what is in our human nature? Untouched by the grace? Our inclination is not to share.

We just need to go to nursery and see that. But a sacrifice is doing good and sharing with others. Those are things that we are called upon to do.

Not the sacrifices on the altars of the Old Testament, stone and wood and fire and blood. But costing. Things that deny mean denying ourselves.

But in the case before us, there are some things that we need to be especially aware of. In this case, David was called to set up this altar and to offer these sacrifices to turn away the plague, the punishment, the judgment that was set upon his people.

As with so many of the regulated sacrifices in the Old Testament, the tabernacle, the temple, turning away God's wrath, the burnt offerings and the peace offerings to bring peace between God and man.

[5 : 48] And it arose, the need for this arose because of sin. And there are just the two things that I would want to dwell on for a little today.

And first, that sin, that error, and then the provision for it, the remedy. The error and the remedy that we have in this chapter.

Let us look at the remedy first, the error first of all, sorry. And we see something that is very unusual for David. I highlighted that when I introduced Psalm 16. That wasn't the natural way for David to go and to try and find what he had in hand to give him strength and refuge and how he was going to deal with the needs of the day.

Back in a couple of chapters earlier than this, in chapter 22, David specifically said, The Lord is my strength. And here in chapter 24, he does something that implies that his strength is in the 1,300,000 valiant men that he had at his disposal.

Why? Why did David do this? Well, we see at the beginning of the chapter, It was the anger of the Lord that was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them.

[7 : 14] The Lord was at work behind the scenes. Other translations take this moved David, incited David, stirred him up, stirred up something in his heart.

And it was because Israel had sinned. Now, these closing chapters of 2 Samuel are perhaps not quite in chronological order. They're kind of summary narratives.

And it is very possible that this may have some connection to the rebellion of Israel under the leadership of David's son, especially David's son, Absalom.

That was wrong. Remember, David set the example himself. When Saul was king, he said, I will not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed.

David was the Lord's anointed king of Israel, and Israel raised their hands against him. It was a rebellion not just against David, but against God.

[8 : 16] And this is perhaps the most likely reason why God's anger was aroused against the nation. But do you see what he's done?

God's anger is against Israel, and he stirs David to commit sin and to bear that sin of the people. The Lord, in his anger, sets out a course that brings further provocation so that it leads into judgment and punishment.

David was drawn into that sin of his people. And we find through that chapter that he takes personal responsibility for it. In verse 10, David's heart smote him.

David said, I have sinned greatly in what I have done. There's almost no reference whatsoever now to what had stirred up God's anger in the first place amongst the people.

[9 : 26] David takes responsibility. Now, you might well ask, what is the sin? Why is David so smitten in heart? Why is he saying, I have sinned greatly in what I have done?

The error was to number the fighting men. Now, numbering, doing a census was not wrong. Back in the book of Numbers, given the name, in chapter 1, chapter 26, twice, God himself directs Moses to number the people.

That was God's requirement to establish the resources at their disposal. But this was not a situation of that kind.

This came out of the heart of man, although we know that it was David, the Lord, who moved David to do it. It's a sign of trust in the strength of the army.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 17, there are the instructions as to how the king was to behave when they eventually got a king. And there, the king was told, you must not trust in horses, like the other armies of the nations, Egypt and so on.

[10 : 44] That was the sign of great strength. And the king was told, that's not to be your strength. Now, these were men rather than horses, but it's part of that same picture.

It was inappropriate. The remarkable thing, I think, here is we often think of David as a great man of God and of faith. But what do we see in verse 10? Sorry, verse 3.

Joab, who was a nasty character himself in many ways, and the captains of the army, they saw the problem. They knew the right spirit to approach the life of the nation, and they saw that David was going against that and warned him.

But David prevailed. David was strong-minded, and he disobeyed that instruction of the Lord, at least by extension. Now, let's just pause for a moment and reflect on perhaps a community, perhaps a country, perhaps the world.

What are you? What are we? What are people using? What are we resorting to for our strength? What are the numbers in the newspapers?

[12:04] There's percentage growth of GDP. That's our strength. We're a strong economy, and so on. How often is there mention, the Lord is great. The Lord is mighty.

The Lord is gracious. We put our trust in so many other things. We put our trust in the politicians to solve our problems. There are lessons here.

The Psalms speak of it so often. Psalm 16 spoke of it, that you and I sang. We took the words on our lips. Do we mean those words as we go from here?

The Lord is my strength and my refuge, not my back balance, or my education, or my family.

Ultimately, only the Lord himself. David raises that question for us too. Because the very clear word of God is, don't put your trust in these things.

[13:13] They vanish. They pass away like the morning mist. Don't put your trust there, but in the Lord.

That's what that instruction was about. Don't trust in horses. Don't trust in millions of men. I'm your strength.

I will go into battle. How often had David done that before? That he prayed, and he prayed, and he said, Lord, should I go into battle? The Lord said, yes, and I will go with you. And so often the Lord himself fought, and David hardly had to raise a sword.

And yet he does it in this case. But it all goes back to the sin of the people, that he was brought into that error of his ways.

In fact, in the parallel story, in 1 Chronicles chapter 21, it also includes Satan. Satan is involved here as raising, inciting, stirring up, moving David to do this as well.

[14:20] It's appointed by the Lord. Satan is active, and stirs the heart of man, man's willfulness. That comes to the fore again. But what the Lord is doing here, is putting David in the firing line.

What do you want me to do? He said. There are a number of choices that were to come. David was the one who was to bear the brunt. He did bear the brunt. You see it repeatedly in his spirit, bearing the anguish over what he had done, the error of his ways.

David says, I am accountable. No reference whatsoever to anyone else. And not the Lord either. He doesn't say, well, I'm a king of a sinful people.

Lord, look at them. But nor does he say, Lord, you made me do this. You are the one who ordains all things. We know our theology. He knew it too.

But he doesn't say that. He says, I have sinned. Lord, be merciful to me.

[15:32] Psalm 8, what does he talk about? God's sovereign rule over the universe, the cosmos, all things, and the affairs of men, the hearts of men.

But it's not, I'm not placing the blame on you, Lord. I receive it. I am accountable. And I will bear the cost of it.

David did receive the weight of the Lord's judgment. It was wonderful yesterday evening, wasn't it, where we read of Jesus' words, let these go.

Take me, let these go. How often that was the refrain that you find right through Scripture. That's what's happening here again. I didn't know last night.

I was anticipating referring to this chapter before I came last night. And I see the same thing again.

The Spirit of God working through His anointed to say again, let these people go.

[16:44] Let me bear the pain and the judgment. He says, these are just sheep. Leave them alone.

Let me bear the cost. Which He does under the guidance of the Lord. The Lord gave Him the way of escape, if you like. The Lord said, what you need to do is to build an altar.

Make a sacrifice. The Lord has done that from the beginning. He said, here is the way of peace with me. Lay down a sacrifice.

Make an offering. Peace. A whole burnt offering. The fullness of life given over. Make that offering. There is the remedy that the Lord gives.

There is the error of David's ways which puts him right in the face of God in his sin. And then God gives the remedy. The answer.

[17:48] I think, I find it a wonderful thing where David was given the choices by the prophet Gad. And then he comes in verse 14 and he says, let us fall now into the hand of the Lord for his mercies are great.

Yes, even in punishment in wrath he knew the Lord was merciful. Let me not fall into the hand of man. Still there was trust in the Lord's mercy.

The three days of plague that followed that did afflict the people to a large degree 70,000 men. It could have been far harder if it was not that the Lord is merciful.

There are many hard experiences for many of us in our lives and many in the world in our lives. But still even in that the Lord is the one of mercy.

Let us see the Lord's mercy. The Lord himself in verse 16 was grieved. The Lord repented him of the evil. He said enough is enough. Don't go any further in this punishment.

[19 : 06] The Lord was merciful. And then he continues in that mercy by giving David that instruction, that guidance. What is the answer? What do you require of me?

This is the way. Set out this altar and make those sacrifices. this chapter doesn't tell us why it should be there but Chronicles also suggests very strongly that this was the beginning of the path to the placing of the most holy place.

This was Mount Zion place where God chose to dwell amongst his people as eventually Jerusalem was set there and the temple as well.

and this occasion shows the real significance of the temple and of the Zion that was to be established here.

The Zion that is so often spoken of in the years to come in the Psalms that this was the great place of gathering of God's people from all the nations ultimately and this is indicating the significance of that place this is the place where the great sacrifice was to be offered and God was to be brought to reconciliation that we were to be reconciled men were to be reconciled to him through this offering in the place of men build an altar David knew that meant sacrifices he did it because God had said so the tabernacle at this time was in Gibeon somewhere else but yet God said here is the place so David followed it and then he encounters Arunah the Jebusite who was humbled at the thought of this place being chosen his place a non-Israelite in himself quite a challenge a call and how often we are challenged too by those around us who do see some from time to time a great work of [21 : 26] God and are humbled and have things to teach us he was only too eager to make his contribution it was a lovely spirit but perhaps this is the biggest thing of all though he was only too pleased to be able to give what was needed David saw there was something bigger there it was inappropriate it was a lovely spirit it was a humble spirit it was an offering a sacrificing spirit but it wasn't what was needed at the time it didn't meet the need of the matter and so often that's the way for all men we need to be reminded of this how often are we coming to the Lord saying well let me give again there were reminders of that yesterday evening we want to make the sacrifice that counts and it does come with some kind of worshipful or humble spirit but if God says that's not the way it would be a proud spirit to insist to go on to say

I must I must I must Arunah doesn't he's willing to give way David says no I must do this Arunah sells the things that David requires he accepts that David has the wisdom of God he accepts that there is this one way that is required only one way adequate are you seeing the hints are you seeing the clues here the patterns with which God has worked and he presents it again in this wonderful way in this experience of David and David takes the way that God gives the way that God directs he takes the burden entirely upon himself for the sin that he has committed and by doing so for the sin of the people that had aroused the wrath the anger of God against them and he says it has to cost me something it has to be my sacrifice for my people it's that the people might be free to turn away God's judgment and punishment over them he gives the burnt offerings these are the wholeness the fullness everything nothing held back symbolizing what is required of God's servant God's people there are the fellowship or the peace offerings renewing the covenant relationship between God and man God made the provision God gave directed David in that direction where he would find those things that he had need of in the place he needed it was under God's ruling God's instruction but God David takes it up he represents as he rules he stands in place of the sinning people he bears the cost himself and I bring this to you because it foreshadows excellently the great son of David who would do and has now done exactly the same on a much grander more complete scale his people sinned and sin the Lord is righteously angry and he would punish every single one of us but as he did here he provides a way a person who will bear the cost David's great son God's own son takes up the sin of his people unlike David he was without sin but he takes every sin of his people upon him and he says don't look at them look at me it wasn't just to the soldiers in the garden as we read last night that he said let these go he is saying to the Lord

himself God in heaven take me let me bear the cost I will be the sacrifice I will make that sacrifice the only sacrifice that is adequate and suitable I will bear that let them go these are but sheep isn't it wonderful as he stands before God for his people and he says he says

I will not offer unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nothing yes he did say didn't he if there's any other way take this cup from me but not my will thy will be done I will take that cup that pain that suffering that sacrifice will be mine and the Lord's anger is turned back there is fellowship restored with the Lord because he is the sacrifice that he makes himself but before I finish that would be a wonderful note to finish on and to have that taste lingering with us as we go on from here but there is something else that it indicates that we also need to take as we go from here because that remedy does send us a word to first to receive it to receive that cost that sacrifice that's offered in our place

[28 : 03] Israel had sinned but they gained relief from God's judgment through this sacrifice and they received it they accepted it Aruna symbolizes that as one of the nations he received it he said well yes if that's the case if that's the way it must be done if that's the way the Lord ordains it I will receive that it is adequate it is more than enough no one ran up to David at this point and said but please let me add something they stood and accepted and took what he gave and the freedom that it brings that is so important that is so important friends because that is so hard for you and for me and our pride and our stubbornness that we so want to bring something ourselves but no and that's what the

Lord's Supper reminds us of so vividly there is no life except through his body and his blood that sacrifice the one sacrifice received by the Lord receive it accept it to those who received him he gave the right to be the children of God John tells us and respond sacrifices not for salvation not for salvation one little bit receive first that sacrifice for salvation in Christ it's not for salvation it's not for escape from punishment but there are sacrifices to be offered those things are done but there are things that come out of sheer thankfulness and this word should be ours too those sacrifices of praise and of doing good and of sharing with others they will cost you but isn't that a great joy I will not bring anything to offer that does not cost me nothing cost me nothing it will cost but let it bring an offering Psalm 96 we began with bring an offering into God's house but let it be a whole offering of yourself denying self following him taking up the cross it is pride that must go first to receive what can't be paid by us and that leads to praise it leads to service no one else is worthy look what he's done that's what he sets before us as we come around his table God willing tomorrow may his word be a blessing to each one of us for the life that follows let us pray together Lord our God we do pray that your word will be clear among us and for each one that as it is set out as the events of the pastor set out according to your leading that we will know that here is a demonstration of your single purpose towards us to bring us to once more be faithful servants brought to that place by the reconciling work of our Lord Jesus and the great wonder that as he became sin for us we might become the very righteousness of God in him oh Lord we pray that you will indeed meet with each one take away those things that are obstacles to faith take away those things that would prevent us from receiving letting all other things fall aside and opening our hands to receive the great wonders of the gift of our Lord

Jesus Christ and your salvation in him taking his hand that we will go as he has gone to have a like mind that gives all that we would hold of ourselves to seek the good of his name and of all who bear his name and of all that those might yet bear his name according to your purpose we long oh Lord that you will continue to build your church each one desiring the new spirit so different from the spirit of the world but humbled seeking your mercy relying entirely upon your grace glory we pray that you would watch over each one of us and the rest of today we ask

[34 : 08] Lord that you would be with a number in the community who may be grieving at the time and in the various other gatherings in which your name is lifted up and you are worshipped we pray that the glory will be yours in the heart of many and prepare us while we ask for the reception of the great gifts of your grace in Christ set upon the table before us that we anticipate tomorrow and that as we look forward to that we will look upon him who has stood in your presence that may he be seen by us as the one who reigns forever the lamb that was slain sitting upon the throne that for us too we would know he is worthy of blessing and honour glory and power now and forever in his name we pray asking again that you would take sin from us far from us to your own glory

Amen