

Looking and Longing for the King

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we praise you and we thank you for your word this morning. We ask for your Holy Spirit to grant us understanding.

Help us to know your deep love for us, your kindness, your mercy poured out to us in Jesus Christ. And may we worship you with all of our heart, mind, and soul, because we have heard from you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Well, I want to also join James in wishing you a very happy Canada Day today.

And in honor of the fact that we are Canadians in compromise, we're having a 10 o'clock service instead of the 9 and the 11 today. We'll keep going through the whole summer and please welcome people in who will be coming right about the time communion is starting.

You might have to squish in a little bit. I want to add on to what James was saying about the origins of Canada as well. I don't know if any of you know this, but in 1867, there were conferences in London, England, to determine what the form of the Confederation of Canada would be.

[1 : 15] And during that conference, they had to come up with a name for this new country. And there was a delegate from New Brunswick or Nova Scotia who suggested the name Canada, which is a First Nation word, means a gathering place.

And that name was very quickly accepted. But being politicians, there were lots of more suggestions that had to come as part of the motion. And there were quite a few of them, including Tuponia, which is derived from the United Provinces of North America.

We could have been called Tuponia. Another one that was mentioned was Hoccalaga, which is the old name for Montreal.

Now, the statesman, Thomas Darcy McGee, kind of saved the day. And he commented and he said, Now, I would ask any honorable member of the House how he would feel if he woke up some fine morning and found himself, instead of a Canadian, a Tusonian or a Hoccalagander.

And he carried the day and a bad decision was averted that would affect the whole nation every single morning when they woke up.

[2 : 35] Now, you ask me, what does this have to do with 2 Samuel 24? Not much. It has to do with Canada Day. But chapter 24 does have to do with David's very bad decision that affects a whole nation far more negatively than the decision on what would have happened for the name of Canada.

It's a decision to take a census of this new united nation of Israel. And it seems like that's rather benign, taking a census. It's like picking a name for a country.

But it has a disastrous consequence that almost destroys the nation. And our passage today is about how that disaster was averted.

You might wonder why the writer chose this episode in the life of Israel to end 1 and 2 Samuel. We've been through 50-some chapters. Why end it in this way?

Well, we don't know for sure. But this is a wonderful passage that reveals very clearly what the root problem for humanity is.

[3 : 46] And it reveals to us the heart of God's good news for the world. It goes to the very center of God's purposes. Not only for Israel, but for the world.

And we see the glory of God revealed in it. Now, it starts in a way that is uncomfortable for us. It starts by saying, Again, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

And to have a talk and to think through God's anger or wrath is one of those taboo subjects in our culture today. If you want to end a dinner party very quickly, have a discussion on the wrath of God. It's not one of those things that are brought up in polite conversation. And it isn't something that's talked about. We don't even hear it all that much in churches. But the Bible, and especially Jesus, is

completely uninhibited about talking about the wrath of God.

And what the Bible tells us is that God's wrath is perfect and it is just. It has nothing to do with a loss of self-control or irrationality or bad temper.

[5 : 02] It doesn't have to do with frustration. God is all-powerful. The wrath of God in the Bible is God's right and the necessary reaction to moral evil.

And that includes evil that is in our relationships with each other and evil that is in our relationship with God. God is perfectly opposed to evil because he is morally perfect.

He is perfectly good. He is holy. And they go together. And this problem, at the root of every person's life, is the wrath of God.

It's basic to all of us. The Old Testament shows us what Romans 1 tells us. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all godliness, ungodliness, and all unrighteousness of all people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

And the way that God's wrath is revealed, it goes on in Romans 1, is that God gives people over to the sin that they are about. And all of us are affected by it.

[6 : 13] Romans 3 goes on to say that all people, Jews, Gentiles, everyone is under sin. And there is none who is righteous. No one. Not one. Just to make sure that we know, Paul tells us.

But the awful thing about sin is that humans choose to come under God's wrath. And you see that right from the very beginning of the Bible.

If you look at Adam and Eve, they choose to hide from God and stay away from his presence after they disobeyed God, after they sinned.

And God gives them over to that sin, over to that choice. And so they are driven away from the Garden of Eden, away from God's presence, where they are hidden.

They no longer see God. That's exactly what happens with David and all Israel. They chose to turn away from God. We're not told how.

[7 : 08] And they experience God's wrath in that God gives David over to his sin. And the way that chapter 24 describes it is puzzling to us at first.

We look at chapter 24, and it says that God incited, in verse 1, David against them, saying, Go number Israel and Judah. It's a difficult reading.

It makes it sound like David is, that God is causing David to sin. But it's not a mistake. This writer intends to say this. He knows what he's doing.

And the same episode, interestingly, in verse, 1 Chronicles 21, describes it as Satan inciting David to take the census. How do we put those two things together?

It's the same event. Well, it shows us that God's wrath is giving David over to that sin. And God allows Satan to work in David's heart because this is what David and all of Israel have chosen.

[8 : 13] God gives them over to that sin. And it's sobering for us to know that the action of God's wrath is to give humans what they choose with all of its implications.

So people can choose not to ever see God. People can choose not to be reconciled to him. They can choose to be ruled by their own imperfect will and decisions and oppose God forever.

That looks like freedom in our age right now, our age of autonomy. But it is actually slavery. It's actually being under God's wrath.

And that's what happened with David. His sin in the census is doing it without reference to God.

And that's why David says in verse 2, I want to know the number of the people.

And David is ignoring the fact that the people are actually God's people, dependent on God's grace.

And David is a king who is under authority of God, the true king.

[9 : 14] We need to know something about what the census means to God and to Israel to understand this more. It's deeply significant. It is focused on God's relationship with his people.

And so I want to read something from Exodus 30 that tells about how God gave this idea of the census. He says to Moses in verse 11, chapter 30 of Exodus, when you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them.

And each one who is numbered in the census shall give this, a half a shekel as an offering to the Lord, that it may bring the people of Israel in remembrance before the Lord so as to make atonement for their lives.

And what this is about is that the census is really a spiritual exercise. All of the Hebrew people were born into the people of God.

But the census was a way for people to choose to participate in the blessings of that people. It's the way that they choose to participate in the presence of God who is in the tabernacle.

[10:31] It's a way for them to be covered, to choose to be covered by the spiritual sacrifices of the spiritual cover of the sacrifices that are made as well.

It is their way of taking part in the covenant. But David's census was very different. It was about earthly power and his own military ambition without reference to God.

So it was about self-sufficiency. It's about feeling secure in numbers. And even his hardened top general, Joab, that knew that this is wrong.

It is wrong to not... And what he does is he tries to bring God into David's vision. It's quite interesting. Look at verse 3. He says, May the Lord your God, remember that, add to the people a hundred times as many as they are.

Well, the eyes of my Lord the King still see it. But why does my Lord the King delight in this thing? Well, this is a spiritual danger that David is walking into.

[11:37] Joab knows it. It's also a spiritual danger for the church as well. We can measure success success and our own security by people numbers and by dollar numbers.

We can take our own census in effect and be about the things that we think will bring us true prosperity and strength. We can worship the numbers and not the God who transforms and brings true growth.

There's a constant need that we have in the church to place ourselves in God's hands to seek his mission, his direction, his ways, and his provision.

But David goes ahead and he undertakes this huge project that takes nine months or more. And you can see how this is God giving him over to the sin of the people.

It's an exercise in self-reliance and self-planning. It's ruling as though God does not exist. But wonderfully, in the midst of God's wrath, God begins to show his mercy in verse 10.

[12:51] And I want us to look at that. In verse 10, David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, I have sinned greatly in what I have done.

O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant for I have done very foolishly. This is the mercy of repentance. And it's only God's grace that can break in to the tyranny and slavery of sin. In David's life as well as in your life and my life as well. Mercy, God's mercy is his kindness directed to those who do not deserve it.

And this is one of the greatest mercies we have from God. When we, like David, recognize how hideous sin is and how much God detests it, this is God's powerful kindness working in our minds and in our hearts.

And I think that that grace is particularly vivid when he convicts us of sin that is completely acceptable in our culture. Whether it is the sin of resentment or greed or sexual impurity or envy or idolatry self-sufficiency whatever that is.

[14:10] If God shows us that in a way that only he can that is his kindness to us. And so when you say the words of the confession in the liturgy this morning and believe those words you are experiencing a powerful work of God's kindness in your life.

It is the work of repentance. And God continues this work of repentance in the next verses because the day after his repentance David sees the depth of his sin.

God reveals it to him and he reveals to him what that sin would require. And he says in verse 13 through the prophet Gad you can choose three things.

you can choose three years of famine three months of David being pursued by enemies or three days of the plague of this disease that was talked about in Exodus 30.

Now David doesn't pick one of them. He's a wise person. He says I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercy is great but do not let me fall into the hand of man.

[15:27] And God sends the pestilence and 70,000 men during those three days the shortest period of time die. They die of this terrible disease.

Now David here knows something that we often forget and that is that God is far more just than any human judge. And if you and I are honest and I thought this looking to this passage we think I would judge differently.

I would not have let 70,000 men die through this disease. But you know what David says? He says I would rather fall into the hands of God than your hands or my hands.

He is saying that he knows that the very best human justice is cruel and unjust compared to God's perfect justice. God knows the big picture.

We do not. God is perfectly clear on how destructively cruel sin is. But sin blurs our spiritual sight.

[16:33] God's saving purposes are being worked out in this world in ways that we cannot possibly imagine. And that is because God's wrath is surrounded by his mercy.

And that's why David trusts in God's justice. And so what happens in verse 16 is God puts a time limit and a boundary to the destruction of this disease as God does with all evil.

All evil is under God's authority and he limits it. And the angel of death is about to destroy Jerusalem which is what is deserved and what is just here.

But God says to that angel enough. Now stay your hand. And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Arona the Jebusite.

That's in Jerusalem. Now I want you to notice something here and that is that God's wrath is simply stayed or restrained here. It's not dealt with because sin still remains.

[17:30] So the question is what is to be done with wrath? How can God be both just and merciful? Well the end of our passage 17 through 25 gives us the good news.

It is the good news of God. The heart of it. And it starts out with David praying to the Lord as the angels killing the people. And he says this. He says behold God I have sinned and I have done wickedly but these sheep what have they done?

Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house. Well throughout all of David's kingship I think that this is his finest hour.

because it shows the greatest thing for the anointed one is to suffer and perhaps die to avert the wrath of God for his people.

And this is what he's praying to do here. There's a very important word for this. It is called propitiation. And that may be somewhat unfamiliar but if you're coming every week here to St. John's then every other week you're hearing that word in the communion service.

[18:40] And the word propitiation means averting God's anger by an offering. And if you remember one thing about the sermon it would be the definition of propitiation.

Averting God's anger by an offering. If that word slips out in your conversation that you have at work or at home remember it means averting God's anger by an offering.

And David prays to be a propitiation. But God can't accept David's offering because David himself is sinful as he says.

So instead God provides the temporary measure in verse 18. He says go raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Arona the Jebusite. And David goes there with all of his entourage and Arona wonders why is he coming to me?

Why is he coming to my place? And David tells him I want to buy the threshing floor. I want to build an altar to the Lord so the plague will be averted. And Arona's response is absolutely.

[19:44] We don't want the plague. I'll give you everything for free. Anything you want. And may the Lord accept you. But David says something very important in verse 24.

He says no. I will buy it for you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord that cost me nothing. And so David buys the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 shekels of silver.

And David builds an altar there, offers burnt and peace offerings, and the Lord responds to the plea for the land and the plague is averted from Israel.

It's a remarkable way to end this huge book of 1 and 2 Samuel. Because what is being emphasized here by the writer is that God's wrath is averted by Messiah David's costly sacrifice.

And it must be costly. And this is where we see the glory of God as we leave this book. Because this is God's rescue plan. Not only for Israel, but for the world.

[20:51] It is a rescue plan that has at the heart of it the costly sacrifice of a Messiah. Messiah. That goes to the root problem of all of humanity.

That in our sin we are under God's wrath. But there is a greater Messiah. In Jesus we see God's wrath wrapped in mercy.

And we can begin to see the deep love that God has for us. That would provide for the desperately awful hideous sin that afflicts us all.

We see God's love. And that's why John says in 1 John, in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And as we leave this passage now, as I end this sermon, if we see the true weight of our sin and the wrath against us, which Samuel 24 reveals, then we must see that this is the most joyful of news.

[22 : 01] God provides his son Jesus as our propitiation, the infinitely costly sacrifice. And because it is Jesus, God's son, God's wrath is quenched for all time for us.

We have peace with God. He is our father. We are no longer children of wrath. We are children of God. And we can only leave Samuel with a sense of thankfulness and worship.

We can only leave Samuel, therefore, seeing the love of God in that he sent his son as a propitiation. We leave Samuel saying, I will love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength, and love my neighbor as myself.

For God has loved me. He has provided Jesus the infinitely costly sacrifice because he is our Messiah. He is our God.

And he is our King. Amen. Let us pray.

[23 : 14] Amen. There will be moments of silence between spoken prayers when you may bring your own intercessions to the Lord in the quietness of your heart.

From Psalm 9, the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you.

For you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. Heavenly Father, thank you for your great mercy and loving kindness to us when we, like David, call you in the midst of our distress.

thank you, Father, that you have not rained down on us what we deserve, but instead, through an act of propitiation, have given us your Son, Jesus, to save us, to pour your blessing upon us, to show us how broad and wide is your love.

Father, convict us of our sinful ways and fill our hearts with overflowing gratitude to you, our Creator God. Father, on this Canada Day, thank you for our country, a good land, a beautiful land where we enjoy much freedom and prosperity.

[25 : 06] We do pray for our public leaders, especially our Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, our Premier, Christy Clark, and the mayors of our respective cities.

Father, do cause them to walk in your truth and to fulfill their offices to your praise and glory. As we think about our country, we remember the people in Elliott Lake, Ontario, who have suffered tragedy and loss this past week.

Father, help this small community to heal and recover from their devastation. Heavenly Father, we pray for our world, most especially for Syria, where war has continued unabated.

We do earnestly pray for an end to the violence and bloodshed for peace in this country and for humanitarian aid to safely reach civilians caught in the midst of this conflict.

And we lift up the people of Greece who are struggling with tough economic times. Father, we pray that you would sustain them during their present difficulties and cause their leaders to make wise decisions about the way forward.

[26 : 48] Father, we remember missionaries that our church family supports and thank you for their faithfulness. Paul Ratsoy with Lighthouse Harbor Ministries and Dan and Fran Gow with Seeds of Hope.

We also pray for the diocese of the Upper Shireh, especially today for Father Grant and his work with Sunday school teachers and children. May all know your provision and your strength and protection for them and their families.

And Father, we lift up to you our larger Anglican family, the Anglican Network in Canada and its bishops. Today, we pray for two church projects in Alberta, Living Water Anglican Fellowship in Athabasca and Grace Anglican Church in Calgary.

May each of these communities know the presence and comfort of your Holy Spirit as they worship you and seek your guidance. Heavenly Father, we turn now to our own parish of St. John's.

We thank you for your grace and mercy to us, your people, during all the changes of this past year and for our clergy and staff who have walked with us and so faithfully served us during this time.

[28 : 20] Now, having gone through a series of meetings to discern a way forward, we pray most earnestly that you would keep us united, looking always to you, our shield and defender, and that you would protect us from the snares of the evil one who seeks to divide us.

Father, in your great wisdom, by the power of your Holy Spirit, lead and guide us, your people, that we may honor and adore you in all we say and do.

Father, we pray most especially for our kids' Bible camp this week, for the children who will attend and those youth and adults who will lead and assist in this wonderful outreach, that all may know the love of our Lord Jesus through the word taught, through the activities organized, and through relationships nurtured.

We commit to you many Christian camps reaching out to children and youth over the summer, that these would be safe experiences for all and that many may come to know the Lord Jesus.

and now, Father, we bring to you those we know in our parish family who are ill and in particular need of our prayers this day.

[29 : 55] We lift to you Derek, Rowena, Susan, Chris, Linda, Marguerite, Ruth, Glenn, Colton, Doug, and Traff.

We thank you for your love and care for these ones and pray that by your Holy Spirit you would continue your work of healing in their lives. Lastly, Father, we offer to you a concern or a thanksgiving that may be on our hearts at this time.

All these prayers we offer in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.