

Looking and Longing for the King

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Preacher: Ryan Cook

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Holy Spirit, we pray that this word, this text would come to life tonight and that it would speak to us and Lord, we submit ourselves to whatever it is that you would like to speak.

We do this all in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Well, good evening, folks. Happy Canada Day. You like our country?

It's a good place, eh? Most of you aren't Canadians, that's why we got no response, right? I thought they'd throw a Canadian though on tonight to bring the word to you. Well, you know, anything that we have that's good about Canada is only a pale, pale comparison to what we'll have when the kingdom of God comes.

So on Canada Day, let's use it as a type to point us towards Jesus too. Amen. Well, this is the last message in the book of Samuel.

Samuel is quite, been quite an interesting book to go through for me. I don't know about you. Samuel is essentially about God's sovereign choice to choose for himself a king who he would use to rule his people and to bring about peace and rest for his people.

[1 : 37] In the book of Samuel, we quickly, we quickly get introduced to Saul and then a little bit later on we get, we get introduced to David. And we find out very quickly that David, on a really good day, gives us a glimpse into what it looks like to be a good king, a good Messiah.

And on a really bad day, he shows us the worst of, that human nature has to offer, doesn't he? I mean, David's bad days are different than my bad days. David, you know, takes Bathsheba and then kills her husband.

I mean, this is like all in a day's work. But on a good day, he represents to us God's Messiah. And throughout centuries after that, especially getting in and around the time of Jesus, when people were looking for a paradigm of what they were hoping for in a Messiah.

The book of Samuel and the life of David became that paradigm. The person they were hoping for was shown to them in type through the book of Samuel.

It's a very important book. That's why the Gospel of Matthew opens up. It says, The book of genealogy of Jesus, the son of David. Identifying Jesus with this Messiah, the one that's hoped for, the one that was going to bring the forever kingdom.

[3 : 01] And in these last four chapters of Samuel, I think we are getting a glimpse into what it looks like, or what God's Messiah looks like.

Strictly speaking, chapters 21 to 24, we're getting an overview of David's life. But what also emerges from this is this shadowy picture of how a king should act, how God's king should act, and what it finally looks like when that king rescues his people.

The question I'd like you to hold in your mind as we're going through this text today, something I want you to keep asking whenever you feel like it as I'm speaking, is this.

I want you to ask yourself, what does this text tell me about God's Messiah? What does this text tell me about the work of God's Messiah?

So starting at verse 1, I'm going to do this in about three sections. Verses 1 to 10, verses 1 to 9, sorry, then 10 to 17, and then 17 basically to the end.

[4 : 14] Right at the beginning of our text tonight, we're encountered with these words. It says, again, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. By starting this text in this particular way, the narrator is like thrusting us into like the middle of a story.

This word again, right at the beginning there, is probably pointing back to chapter 21, which is kind of a mirror of this particular passage, and has a very similar emphasis, which I'm going to let you read that on your own time.

I'm not going to go into it right now. But in chapter 21, Israel, let me just give you the quick overview. In chapter 21, Israel, and Saul specifically, had broken God's covenant.

And this breaking of God's covenant had brought about a three-year famine. And so David jumps in and he mediates with some fairly drastic measures to restore God's favor in Israel.

[5 : 21] And so 21 and 24, you'll see by the time we get done 24 here, 21 and 24 service kind of bookends to a larger picture. But whatever the case, it seems that in chapter 24, Israel has again sinned.

Now we don't get let in on what exactly their sin was. And if I was to be really honest with myself, it kind of bothers me that the text doesn't tell us what exactly Israel did to kindle the anger of God against them.

I don't know about you, but there's something about the fact that God doesn't tell us what they did as sin. And also just the fact that God gets so angry, it kind of like rubs me the wrong way a little bit. But I think really the fact that God gets angry here and the fact that he doesn't tell us really kind of offends our West Coast religious sensibilities.

There's something I think in us that doesn't want to embrace a God that gets angry at sin.

Furthermore, if he's going to be angry at sin, we want him to give us the details of why he's angry.

[6 : 41] We want to make sure that his reason is reasonable. We'd like to put him inside our little box. Say, God, okay, you can get angry as long as you do it my way.

You know, here in Vancouver, if God assaults our reason, or if he pushes the boundaries of what we perceive to be, you know, acceptable, for most of us, we just find a way of kind of explaining around him.

Or we just find another God that fits within our paradigm of what it means to be religiously sensible. You know, I have to confess that during my preparation of this message, I was extremely tempted to find a way to make God sound not so intense.

I wanted to find a way of making God seem a little bit more palatable for West Coast Vancouver life. But I found out as I studied this passage that if I was to do that, I'd be doing a real disservice to this passage.

I'd be watering down something this passage is clearly trying to articulate to us, something this passage is clearly trying to express to us. And that is the seriousness of sin and God's hatred of that sin.

[8 : 13] This picture of what we find in this passage, this picture of God that we find in this passage, you know, one who is angry with sin does not fit in to our tidy kind of Lululemon safe religion culture.

When I think about tidy, safe religion, I think about the moment in the Chronicles of Narnia where one of the children turns to Mr. Beaver and asks if Aslan was safe.

Is Aslan safe? Mr. Beaver replies, safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he is good. I think this is kind of the picture of God that we see in this passage. He's not safe, but we'll find out that he is good.

I think it's important to keep in mind when we talk about the anger of God. God's anger is not some sort of super intensification of human anger.

[9 : 15] It's not like you getting angry, but only to the nth degree. In the anger of God, there is no sin, which is very different from you and I. And as we look at the anger of God, we need to realize that somehow in the midst of this anger is infinite goodness.

So right from the beginning of this passage, we bump into this text about God being angry. Offends us a little bit. And then it doesn't get any easier as we move a couple of words along the way.

It says, The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he incited David against them. What does this mean? God somehow is compelling David to do something that he later considers sin?

What are we supposed to make of this? Well, I guess, you know, to be honest, I can't answer that for you. What I can give you is a few thoughts about it, though.

And here's two. And they're not going to tide you over because they don't satisfy reason. But here's a few thoughts. It's clear, first of all, by the time we get to verse 10, that this story is transitioning and David is repentant.

[10 : 36] And he's also taking full responsibility for the sin that he's committed. So the text gives us this idea that David is fully responsible for this sin.

This doesn't totally answer the question. But it shows us that the focus of the sin should be on David. And secondly, it's important to understand that according to Hebrew thinking, whatever God permits, he commits.

Whatever God permits, he commits. The Hebrew people, the writers of this passage, saw things a little bit differently than you and I. They were not as concerned as you and I are about nailing down, you know, the primary cause and the secondary cause.

And did God cause this or did Satan cause this? 1 Chronicles 21, it actually says at the beginning of this same story that Satan pulled David into this act.

So who was it? Was it Satan or was it God that pulled David into this act? Well, I don't know if there's a really solid answer other than for the Hebrew people, they understood that within the sovereignty of God, whatever God decided to do or whatever he allowed to happen was good.

[12:01] And they weren't passionate about trying to nail down these primary secondary causes. They could just as easily say, well, it was David that did it. They could say, the writer could say, well, it was Satan that did it.

Or they could say, well, it was God that did it. Because at the end of the day, God permitted it to happen and God is sovereign over all things. And this passage is definitely not one of those seeker sensitive, make you feel good passages.

And it doesn't, it kind of assaults our reason, doesn't it? Kind of frustrates our picture of who God is. We'd love him to be a lot safer than this.

And we'd love him to be a lot more tidy than this. But the facts are that he just isn't. So while this passage makes me a little bit uncomfortable, and it probably makes you a little bit uncomfortable, didn't really probably leave the original writers feeling terribly uncomfortable.

It's possible that maybe what we should do in light of what we find in this passage is pray that God would help us in whatever situation we face in life, when we're faced with these kinds of questions, to help us to trust him.

[13:14] Whether it seems to us to be good, the situation that we're in, or it seems to be bad. Lord, help us to trust you. And it says that, it says that David took a census.

What's the big deal with taking a census? Why was the king not supposed to take a census?

Because in other parts, it does say that God told the king to take a census.

So what's the big deal here? Well, David takes a census, and he gets Joab to sort of execute it. And you'll notice in the text, I mean, Joab is not happy about this.

And Joab is, you know, super pragmatic guy. Doesn't really strike us as someone who's like terribly in tune with what God's doing. Through this narrative. And he's like unsettled about it.

Joab's like unnerved about this census thing. And it seems to me that at the end of the day, what this, why this census was wrong, is because taking a census was a radical departure from faith in God.

[14:16] Counting soldiers in the Bible is sort of like the opposite of trusting in God. You remember the text in Psalm chapter 20?

It says, Seems that in this text, David was acting sort of autonomously, apart from God, just kind of like, see what he had at his disposal, to see how powerful he was, to see what he could do by his own power and might.

I guess it's kind of similar to maybe the way that we in our Western culture treat our bank accounts. We've got lots of cash there. We feel somewhat secure.

When we don't, we feel a little bit weak. But in all things, we're supposed to trust. So in chapter 24, verse 1 to 10, we get this picture of God, the focus of the passage, the focus of this little chunk is the fact that God's wrath is against Israel and now it's against their king also.

The next section though, verses 10 to 17, this is kind of a transition. And David, the one who had committed this sin, who had acted in pride, is now, now transitions to being humble and penitent.

[15:44] You can read his, his prayer in verse 10. You can also read, the section here is bracketed. Verse 10 and verse 17, two prayers of David. One where he's crying out to God in repentance.

The one where he's crying out to God on behalf of the people. Saying, God, let this come on me. Don't let this come on the people. It's also interesting in this passage that in verse 17, when David's praying for his people, he calls them, he calls them sheep.

In the previous passage, he kind of like asserted himself and was calling, was kind of conscripting the soldiers to use them for war. And in this passage, he's returned to realizing that God's king is supposed to be a shepherd over his people.

God's Messiah is supposed to be a shepherd. In verses 13 and 14, David repents. He's given three choices by God. He says, okay, here's the consequences.

You can either have three years of famine, you can either be fleeing from your enemies for a season of time, or you can have three days of pestilence, a plague. And David chooses the option that puts him in the hands of God.

[16:55] It's beautiful, actually, the way that David makes this decision. He decides it would be better for him to be at the mercy of God than at the mercy of his enemies. I also think it's interesting in this text that David, you know, David could have chosen famine because the king, the king was always going to eat.

If there was food in the land, it was going to be the king that ate. David would find some way of making it through famine. Also, if David was to be called into war, if his enemies were chasing him, David would be protected with the best men of the land.

But with this plague, it's kind of like David decides to enter the fray with his people. Decides to put himself at the mercy of God.

He enters into their condition. I'll let you think about that. After this, it says that the wrath of God, it's so uncomfortable, isn't it?

The wrath of God is poured out and 70,000 people die. When the angel of the Lord, after he kills these 70,000 people and he's moving towards Jerusalem, he's moving towards the capital and he stops at the threshing floor and God stays the plague.

[18:11] In his mercy, he stops what's going on. It's almost like he opens up a window for intervention. At the beginning of this message, I told you to ask yourself a question.

What does this tell us? What does this text tell us about the work of God's Messiah? I think this tells us, first of all, that the wrath of God stands against sin.

And if the Messiah of God, if God's king is going to rescue his people, he's going to have to deal with the wrath of God. He's going to have to deal with the wrath of God.

And I guess the question that the reader, the question you and I are left with, is how is he going to deal with the wrath of God? This leads us into verses 18 to 25.

It says that the prophet Gad that day comes to David and gives him the word of the Lord. And he says to him, he tells him to go and raise an altar and offer a sacrifice to the Lord at the threshing floor of Arana, the Jebusite.

[19:21] It's interesting. This is the site where later on, I don't have time to go in this, but this is the site where later on Solomon builds his temple where thousands and thousands of sacrifices will happen to avert the wrath of God.

So this offering of a sacrifice in the wake of the wrath of God introduces us to a biblical word, a theological word, and that word is propitiation.

Everybody say that. Okay, say it with some gusto. Okay, so you've got, you've now got a theological word in your toolbox. You're getting your tithes worth tonight.

Okay, folks, you ready? What is propitiation? To make propitiation for something is to offer a sacrifice to God that would absorb the wrath of God into itself, that wrath that was specifically directed before towards certain people.

It's a sacrifice that absorbs the wrath of God into itself and frees the people from the curse that they were under. So David arrives at this place where God commanded him to go.

[20:44] He goes up to the threshing floor and he talks to Arana, the landowner. Arana comes out to meet him and Arana comes to the king and he says to him something really interesting.

He says, listen, David, take the land for free. And David's rebuttal is awesome. It says, listen, Arana, I am not going to take this land for free.

I will not offer to God burnt offerings or a sacrifice that costs me nothing. I'm not going to offer to God a sacrifice that costs me nothing.

It says that David built an altar there and he offered the Lord this sacrifice which would absorb the wrath of God into itself. After this, the Lord responds to David's sacrifice and the plague is averted.

The people are rescued. This point, I want to ask that question again. What do we learn from this text about the work of God's Messiah?

[21 : 53] I think what we learn is that in order to avert the wrath of God that hung over the people, the Messiah would have to offer a propitious, it's a good word, a propitious sacrifice which would absorb the wrath of God and a sacrifice that would come at great cost to himself.

This sacrifice would directly rescue the people. So the book of Samuel ends like this. It's peculiar, isn't it?

The book of Samuel ends with a story about the wrath of God being poured out on sinful people and the Messiah or the anointed king who seeks to avert this wrath through absorbing the wrath of God into this propitious sacrifice that comes at great cost to himself.

This is how the book of Samuel ends. It's very interesting, I think, that it ends this way. I think it's very interesting that it doesn't end with talking about the death of David.

It doesn't kind of seal off this chapter. We have to go into Kings to kind of figure out what happens here. But I think that this is very deliberate on the part of the writer.

[23 : 13] This is a technique that leaves us thinking about one who would avert the wrath of God from the sinner, leaves us thinking about one who would make a propitious sacrifice sacrifice that would come at great cost to himself.

This is what we're stuck in our mind with after we read the book of Samuel, after we study through the book of Samuel. It's the last thing on our minds. Folks, we of course know that this Messiah figure, we of course know that the whole book of Samuel, like Aaron said, is pointing towards Jesus.

We're told in the book of Romans, it says this, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

It's not very popular, but it is the truth of scripture that if we're not in Christ, we stand in the way the wrath of God and the destruction of sin.

Romans tells us in many places that the sinfulness of men has made them rebels against God. unless something is done to avert this wrath, unless something is done to absorb this wrath, those rebels will ultimately experience death.

[24 : 40] But folks, the good news is that like David interceded for his people, and like this passage points to, Jesus Christ is the one who provided the sacrifice, a sacrifice that came at great cost to himself, a sacrifice of his own life.

Hebrews tells us that he was made like his brothers, he was made like you and I, he took our place so that he might become the merciful high priest in service of God, one that would make propitiation, gotta love that word, propitiation for the sins of the people, was the body of Christ that absorbed our punishment.

It's the body of Christ that absorbed the punishment for our sin, that absorbed the plague that threatens us all. 1 John 2, verse 1-2 says, My children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin, but if any does sin, we have an advocate, we have a mediator with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

Jesus is our mediator. As I stop here, I have two things that I'd love for you to consider. I'd love for you to take home and ponder. We're all in different places here tonight.

Some of us are like feeling fairly strong in our faith. Some of us have not come to faith. Some of us are feeling weak in our faith, but wherever you're at, I've got two things for you to consider.

[26 : 18] Even though it might be hard for us in our Western culture to understand the severity of our sins, and even though you may in your own mind have downplayed the destructiveness of sin, what you need to hear tonight is that your sin is worse than you can imagine, and its consequences are more devastating than you ever thought.

It's the first thing you need to remember. Your sin is worse than you can imagine. Second thing I'd love for you to think about is that the love of Christ for you is greater than you could ever imagine.

The penalty of our sins was absorbed into his body, and when you were still embracing your sin, and before you were even born, Christ gave his life as a sacrifice for you.

scriptures say that while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a religious person, but God showed his great love for us in this, that while we were still yet sinners, Christ died for us.

It was by his love that we had been freed from the penalty of our sins. Friends, can I implore you tonight to throw yourselves trustingly into the hands of Christ, who was the propitiary, that's a great word, I love it, propitiary sacrifice for your sins.

[28 : 00] As we conclude the book of Samuel, let us set our eyes on Christ, the Messiah King who has already come and averted the wrath of God and dealt with the punishment for our sin at great cost to himself.

In these concluding moments of this series, the book of Samuel, let us turn our hearts in thankfulness to the one whom the whole book of Samuel really points to, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

Amen.