

Worship: Finding the Place of Forgiveness

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

September 30, 2018

TEXT: 1 Chronicles 21:1-30



Good morning, beloved. We are in the midst of a series this fall on worshipping God. Our vision statement as a church calls us to be people who worship God, live by His Word, and join His mission in the world. To worship God flows out of who God is. It is a response to who He is. It is also a response to what He does in our lives, and this morning, as we look at 1 Chronicles 21, we see that worship takes place when heaven and earth meet together; that worship takes place when we experience the grace of the living God. This morning, we look at a passage where the gospel is really large in the life of King David. The gospel is good news of great joy for forgiven sinners. There are two great things I want you to know and feel this morning. The first of those great things is that I want us together, myself included, to be appalled at sin. I really do. I want us to be appalled at it in a new way. It is only when we are appalled at our sin that the grace of God appears in the staggering, beautiful magnitude that it really is. If our view of sin is low, then grace seems like something relatively small, but if our view of sin is great and accurate, then our view of grace will be great and accurate and will fuel our worship. What do you do you make a mistake? For many of us, our first reaction is to give the attendant circumstances, as though that makes it better. Do you defend yourself, giving the circumstances? Others of us, whenever we make a mistake, just deny it right away. Others, we have to cover it up and pretend it didn't happen.

So, let's look at this passage this morning where we see great sin in the life of David, but we see a greater grace than we can imagine in the end. The chapter begins in 1 Chronicles 21:1 with the statement:

"Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel."

Satan rarely makes a direct appearance in the biblical narrative, and yet here he seems to just leap off the page right into the story. He is not introduced. He comes in, and the verb is critical here: he *stood against*. *Satan* in Hebrew means *the adversary* or *the accuser*. He is standing against you, antithetical to you, not equal in power with God, but someone who is working against you. The specific act of opposition in 1 Chronicles 21:1, the ESV translates as *incited*. Have you ever been goaded or lured into doing something? We use the word *tempted: to incite, goad, entice, or to tempt*. The term that is used here in the narrative is actually the term that is used in a military context: to draw someone out into an open-pitched battle which can often be catastrophic. Satan rises up and incites David, and the specific enticement in this verse is to count. We love to count. This strikes us as: "What's wrong with this?" Aren't we concerned with accuracy, a complete reckoning? The king might rightly say: "I'm just interested in the state of the kingdom. What are the available resources?" We live in a society that counts all kinds of things: our reward points, attendance at games. You can even look up a major league baseball player and get their detailed statistics of how they batted, whether they were batting right-handed and the pitcher threw a slider with two outs. That kind of information is important, maybe. To count. That's the enticement, and Satan will often come to you, to stand against you, in opposition to you, and lure you into doing something that at first glance seems like a good idea.

So David proceeds. He says to Joab in 1 Chronicles 21:2:

"Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number."

From Beersheba to Dan: from the south to the north. Joab, the commander of the army, brings into life for us what was so wrong with this. Joab says in 1 Chronicles 21:3:

"May the LORD add to His people a hundred times as many as they are!"

Notice that Joab puts the Lord in first place. Joab signals to David with godly counsel that it is the Lord's blessing that is determinative in our lives. Secondly, he says:

"Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants?"

There's no need for a test of loyalty. Then he says:

"Why should my lord required this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for the nation to reckon the number?"

In 1 Chronicles 21:4, we read:

“But the king's word prevailed against Joab.”

Literally, it says that the king's word was strong. Has your boss ever compelled you to do something that you really didn't want to do? The boss' word was strong in this case. In other words, perhaps: “Count the people or find another army to command!” Joab is prevailed upon. He goes throughout the land, specifically the northern portion, and he comes back to Jerusalem with the reckoning. He gives an impressive sum in 1 Chronicles 21:5:

“And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to David. In all Israel there were 1,100,000 men who drew the sword, and in Judah 470,000 who drew the sword.”

There are 1,500,000 available warriors, the second-largest capable army that we know of from antiquity. It's an impressive number, isn't it? “I've got 1,500,000 available man, and I'm feeling pretty confident about that. Let's execute on some plans. Let's maybe do what God never allowed His people to do in Scripture.” There are no offensive military engagements in Scripture. David probably was in an elevated mood, and yet, in 1 Chronicles 21:7, we read:

“But God was displeased with this thing, and He struck Israel.”

Literally, the text says that this action was evil in the eyes of God. That's what it says. Why was David's counting of the potential of an army so evil in the eyes of God?

This is where we must grapple with the appalling nature of our sin. Let's look at this more closely. What's at stake? The first element that's at stake is: **Who do you trust?** Psalm 20:7 says:

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”

Who do you trust? Your horses and chariots, or do you trust God? Psalm 147 asks us to consider whose favor is determinative in your life. Psalm 147:10-11 says of the real King, the righteous King:

“His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor His pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.”

Whose favor matters? What's at stake for David is whose eye matters the most. Psalm 33:16-18 says:

“The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love.”

Do believe that? Your big army, your calculation of available resources, doesn't matter a 'lick' in the outcome. A warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The warhorse is a false hope for salvation, but *“behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him and who hope in His*

steadfast love." The determinative factor in our lives is whom you trust, whose favor matters, whose eye matters. Sin is a temptation, a luring of us out into the open plain where we assert our independence from God. That's what the enemy is luring us to do. It is the same strategy as in the Garden of Eden: lure you out into the open and assert your independence. Sin is an assertion of autonomy that separates us from our heavenly Father. That's what God's Word specifically says of the king in Deuteronomy 17, that he should not acquire many horses. You see, sin is also a betrayal of our own discipleship, and David knew this.

Remember, when David was selected by God and anointed as king in 1 Samuel 16, David was not even counted among his brothers. Samuel came, and David's eldest brother Eliab stood before him, and Samuel said: "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." The Lord said to Samuel: "Don't look at the appearance or the height. The Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Seven of Jesse's sons pass before Samuel, and then Samuel finally has to ask: "Are all your sons here?" Jesse says: "I have one other, but I didn't count him." David is brought before the prophet, and we read in 1 Samuel 16:12:

"And the LORD said, 'Arise, anoint him, for this is he.'"

David's not even being counted is such a critical element in his own discipleship, and remember what happens right after his anointing in the next chapter. David goes to fight in the name of the Lord with this man who was a champion of the Philistines. If you ever wanted to see a stud in great armor, Goliath of Gath is the man! I mean, he's is the man. His armor is described in such detail, and yet his armor will be his downfall.



David comes, trying to posture himself with military victory. He tries on Saul's armor, but it doesn't even fit. He says, "I can't go out these," but instead he goes and picks up five smooth stones. I picked up five stones, and I keep these five stones on my desk so that I see them every day, because I am tempted, I am lured out into an open battle and tempted to trust in myself. I know that all of you are, as well. I know that the enemy, the accuser, will come and say you can do this on your own strength; you can do this with your own available resources; look within; just don't look up. I keep these small stones because the Scripture says that David struck down Goliath. He fell and couldn't even get up. His armor proved to be his detriment, and he was destroyed. David knew this, and that's why the counting is such a betrayal of his own discipleship. Sin leads us to sever the relationship with our heavenly Father, but the worst part

of our sin is that sin provokes the judgment of God. Our sin angers our heavenly Father, and it stirs Him to judgment. David realizes this. He says in 1 Chronicles 21:8:

"I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. But now, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."

God's anger is aroused by our sin. Do you realize that our sin is offensive to God, and in His holiness He moves with righteous judgment against it?

God's righteous judgment is brought to David through the word of Gad, his prophet or seer. The Lord says to David in 1 Chronicles 21:10-12:

"Three things I offer you; choose one of them, that I may do it to you. . . Choose what you will: either three years of famine, or three months of devastation by your foes while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days of the sword of the LORD."

David replies in 1 Chronicles 21: 13:

"I am in great distress. Let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercy is very great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

If I really believed that my sin made God be the One who was against me, I would fear Him more. I don't want God against me. David chooses to place himself in God's judgment. We also see here that sin doesn't affect just us. One of the dumbest things that our culture says today is: "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." That's a total lie. Everything about that is a lie. You think you can go and just assert your autonomy? You think you can look online and devour the inside of your soul and not be affected in your other relationships?" That's foolish!

That's what David says: "I acted foolishly. I got tripped, and I got lured out into the open, and I cut off my relationship with my heavenly Father, and now look at what a mess I made!" And guess what! It doesn't affect just David. It affects everyone in his leadership, and God brings a judgment on the nation. A warring angel comes and strikes down 70,000 people, half percent of the standing army, 10 times the number of US casualties in the Gulf War, more than all of the US casualties in combat in the Vietnam War, struck down in three days. God sends a warring angel because of His anger at our sin, and it is a righteous anger. The angel moves from the north then to the south, and the angel reaches Jerusalem and is standing on the threshing floor of *Ornan* (in Chronicles) or *Araunah* (in Kings), the Jebusite. It's the same name with slightly different spelling.

This threshing floor is northeast of the city. It is a large open space just northeast of the walled city. The threshing floor is that place, that large flat area, where grain is gathered and placed down and teams of oxen drag threshing sledges over the grain to separate the grain head from

the stalk to break this apart. You must act with weight and pressure to separate the grain, the

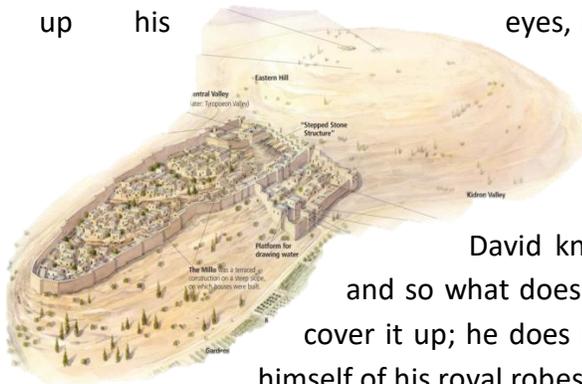


wheat, from the chaff. In modern times farmers in this region will sometimes strike clusters of grain and beat them so that the grain head, that which is nourishing and valuable to be kept, is separated, and then finally the threshing floor is filled with

wheat that is a mixture of heavier grains and light chaff, and workers come with winnowing forks and they toss the wheat up into the air. The chaff blows away and the grain falls to the threshing floor, and over time—hours, sometimes days—the chaff disappears and you are left with just the grain that can be gathered in for harvest.



David looks at this spot northeast of the city. He lifts up his



eyes, and he sees the Angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven. What a majestic sight this must have been, and yet terrifying. An angel who is standing in between heaven and earth, and yet this angel has a drawn sword stretched out over the city.

David knows that 70,000 have been cut down in the north, and so what does he do? He does not deny his sin; he does not try to cover it up; he does not try to give the attendant circumstance. He strips himself of his royal robes, gathers the leadership, and falls on his face, because he understands the appalling nature of sin. Remorse, humility, responsibility: “Was it not I who commanded? I gave the command. I said to do this.”

Brothers and sisters, if the passage ended here, there will be no gospel. I praise God for 1 Chronicles 21:18, because when God sees the repentant heart, the Angel of the Lord speaks and instructs David to go up to the threshing floor and to build an altar there. What is the remedy for sin, sin that we have done, sin that we have suffered? David goes up at the word of the Lord, and he goes up to the threshing floor. When he gets up there, Ornan is there threshing the wheat. As David approaches this man, Ornan looks at him and the bows before him. David says to Ornan in 1 Chronicles 21:22:

“Give me the site of the threshing floor that I may build on it an altar to the LORD-- give it to me at its full price-- that the plague may be averted from the people.”

Ornan the Jebusite looks to David he says in 1 Chronicles 21:23:

“Take it, and let my lord the king do what seems good to him. See, I give the oxen for burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for the wood and the wheat for a grain offering; I give it all.”

Ornan tells David to take it. That’s what kings do, right? They just take what they want. He says: “Let me give it to you. Let me give it to your give you, not only the land, but here, take my oxen for the burnt offerings, take my threshing sledges for the wood, and look all around you, there is wheat everywhere. Take it for the grain offering. I'm giving you everything you need.” But, David says to him in 1 Chronicles 21:24:

“No, but I will buy them for the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

There's no alternative. You can't take from someone else and offer it as though it is yours. David says: “I want to pay full price. I am not giving to God that which costs me nothing,” and David pays him 600 shekels of gold for the site, and in 2 Chronicles 21:26, we read:

“And David built there an altar to the LORD and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering.”

He was appalled by his sin. He humbled himself before God who told him to build an altar and offer the offering for sin, and he did it. He called on God's name and God answered him with fire from heaven, and then the Lord commanded the angel and put his sword back in its shield. The judgment was turned away. When David saw this, that the Lord had answered him at the threshing floor, he offered a sacrifice there. David had found the place of forgiveness. He found the place of forgiveness where God hears the repentant sinner and honors the sacrifice for sin. In 1 Chronicles 22:1, David says:

“Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel.”

Brothers and sisters, here is the place of forgiveness. This threshing floor, this flat, exposed area northeast of the city. This threshing floor space will become the area where Solomon will build the temple to the Lord. The altar that stands in front of the temple, the altar of sacrifice will be where God receives and puts the gospel on display daily for His people. Solomon will dedicate the temple on this very spot within a generation. Sacrifice for sin will be offered on this very spot for a thousand years, and after a thousand years, One greater than Solomon will come to the city. He is going to walk this very same ground and teach from this very same place, and just a few steps from where David saw the angel standing between heaven and earth, an atoning

sacrifice of averted judgment, Jesus Christ, the Son of David, will stand between heaven and earth, being lifted up on a cross, and His atoning sacrifice will avert God's judgment for everyone who believes. It will be on this very spot.

Do see how God wrote the gospel in advance, right into the middle of His Word? You see, we have got to be appalled at sin. Sin is nasty; it is toxic; it is offensive to God; it is a misplaced trust, a misplaced confidence; it is being lured out into the abyss of independence; it is a betrayal of our own discipleship. That is what it is, and it is aligning ourselves with the enemy of our souls. If you haven't stumbled and you haven't fallen, you're not paying attention. If your movement away from God hasn't hurt people around you, you have got an incredibly low self-awareness. But when you see the cost and you sense God's displeasure, 1 Chronicles 21 tells you what to do: Fall on your face in repentance and look to the altar where God provides the sacrifice of atonement and judgment is averted. God marks this spot out and holds this space as holy ground, for the final sacrifice will be offered there, right there.

What is the response? What did David do when he saw the offering was accepted? What did David do when he saw that his sin was atoned for? David burst into praise and worship. This series is about worship, and we have been stressing that worship is a response. Worship is a response personally and corporately to God for who He is. He is righteous and compassionate. It's a response to who He is and what He has done. David responds in great worship to God, and the rest of 1 Chronicles describes how David makes elaborate preparations for the house of worship to be built on that spot. It's a fantastic design. We will look next Sunday at how his preparation is designed to include everyone because it's not just a personal response, it's a corporate, it's a communal response. It is something that is for all of us.

What is our call to action this morning? It is really just one thing: I want to worship. I want to worship with you. I want to worship God because I am in awe of His holiness and power. I want to worship God because He hears the repentant sinner and answers. I want us to worship God because He has provided the place and the sacrifice for forgiveness. I want to worship God because He has brought us together from death to life in Jesus Christ. I want to worship God together because He is a Living Hope, and it is in Him that we find the place of forgiveness.

I want to pray for us and I want you to prepare your heart for worship. As I pray, I want you to think of your sin. I want you to see it for what it is. Then I want you to worship God for the immeasurable scale of His grace in our lives. Amen.