

RISE AND FALL: 1 & 2 SAMUEL - EPILOGUE

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 10/13/19, Matt Heerema - 2 Samuel 21-24

INTRO

This morning we're wrapping up our series on 1 & 2 Samuel, two parts of a single work "The Book of Samuel", with chapters 21-24. Turn there with me. Today's passage has an interesting structure. If you're following along with the narrative flow of 1 & 2 Samuel, it almost feels like someone at one point had dropped the stack of papers that was the Samuel manuscript, and these last 6 stories got mixed up and just kind of stuck at the back.

They are scattering of narrative and poems (or Psalms) from throughout David's life and reign as king, and the book ends very abruptly! There are a few theories about what is going on here, but what we're looking at here seems to be an epilogue by the authors of the book, and it is structured in such a way to bring focus to the main points of the book of Samuel.

Let's take a look at the structure of the stories, two poem/psalms sandwiched between four flashback narratives, and thematically arranged, in an ABC CBA pattern.

- A. **Atonement:** Saul's political betrayal against a racial group goes ignored, causing God to bring a famine to the land in punishment. David makes atonement by bringing Justice, and God lifts the famine.
- B. **David needs help:** David is weary, four more giants attack, and the mighty men step up and defeat them.
- C. **Poem** - Psalm (18) from the beginning of his reign
- C. **Poem** - Psalm the end of his reign.
- B. **David needs help:** David is homesick, and his mighty men step up to help him feel better.
- A. **Atonement:** God judges David's sin due to lack of trust in the Lord's provision through a plague which kills 70,000 people. David confesses, repents, and makes atonement, and God lifts the plague.

These narratives surround the Psalms and bring focus to them. If we look at the content of the Psalms, we see that they tie back into the beginning of 1 Samuel, to Hannah's prayer, and they highlight the main themes of the book.

God is the rock, the safe place for those who take refuge in Him.

1 Samuel 2:2 (ESV)

"There is none holy like the Lord:
for there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God.

2 Samuel 22:32 (ESV)

"For who is God, but the Lord?
And who is a rock, except our God?"

God humbles the proud, and exalts the humble.

1 Samuel 2:8a (ESV)

He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor...

2 Samuel 22:28 (ESV)

You save a humble people,
but your eyes are on the haughty to bring
them down.

God saves, not man's might.

1 Samuel 2:9 (ESV)

"He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.

2 Samuel 22:18 (ESV)

He rescued me from my strong enemy,
from those who hated me,
for they were too mighty for me.

God promises a messiah-king who will bless and judge the nations..

1 Samuel 2:10b (ESV)

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed."

2 Samuel 22:51 (ESV)

Great salvation he brings to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his offspring forever."

"You have dealt with me according to my righteousness"

2 Samuel 22:21-22 (ESV)

"The Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.
For I have kept the ways of the Lord
and have not wickedly departed from my God.

It is very important to understand that when David says things like this, he is not saying he has never sinned. "Keeping the ways of the Lord" doesn't mean just always doing the right thing and avoiding the wrong thing. We'd all be sunk in that case.

"Keeping the ways of the Lord" doesn't mean sinlessness, it means doing what God tells us to do when do we do sin: confess and repent. And the final story in 2 Samuel shows this very well. It's where I want to focus our application of this passage.

SIN, REPENTANCE, AND CONSEQUENCES

Sin

David took a census (2 Sam 24:1-4). This is a weird story. The core problem is that David, in the face of an enemy attacking Israel, rather than trusting God's repeatedly-proved promise to deliver Israel from their enemies, wants a battle plan he can trust. He takes a headcount of his military to see if he has enough manpower to fight. He forgets that it is not manpower he needs, but God power.

The core problem, as in all sin, is lack of faith. This is our core problem in all our sin, and it is a serious problem, with serious consequences.

Sin is serious.

Conviction and confession.

2 Samuel 24:10 (CSB)

David's conscience troubled him after he had taken a census of the troops. He said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I've done. Now, Lord, because I've been very foolish, please take away your servant's guilt."

We should take sin seriously.

We need to listen to our consciences. When we are bothered about a situation, an action we took, an action we failed to take, we need to examine that seriously. We need to own our fault: One old confession prayer talks about "By what I've done or left undone, in thought, word, and deed..." We need to pay attention to those things and call them what they were. Not, "slips" or "oopsies", or "mistakes", but sin. Sin against the most high God. And sin has consequences.

Consequences

2 Samuel 24:15 (ESV)

"The Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men."

Sin has serious consequences. Don't dodge them by running or ignoring. Face them. God will provide strength to suffer well. Don't give up hope. Sin is devastating to your soul, to your family and friends, and church. It has serious consequences. But you are never completely beyond hope. David knew something needed to happen to take away his guilt. So he asked God what to do. God sent the prophet Gad to let him know.

Revealed Propitiation

2 Samuel 24:18 (CSB)

Gad came to David that day and said to him, "Go up and set up an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

Look to God.

This is usually the opposite of what we want to do in our sin. We often want to, like our first father and mother, Adam and Eve, hide and excuse our sin. David also did this in the case of Bathsheba. He tried to cover his sin, failing that, he murdered to cover it up. And it required a prophet confronting him directly, who knows how much longer, before he finally confessed. The consequences were devastating.

David here look to God to find out how to make it right. And God sends Gad the prophet to let him know. He reveals a the propitiation necessary to remove the sin. Propitiation is one of those tricky theological words that we need to know. There is not a good synonym. The best way to define it here is "to remove God's wrath" - David asks what must be done to remove God's judgement. And Gad tells him.

God tells us what the propitiation for our sin is. His name is Jesus. Jesus did the work that needs to be done to remove God's wrath toward our sin, and God says, look to his sacrifice and trust it. This requires us to follow-through in obedience.

Faith-filled followthrough in obedience.

2 Samuel 24:19 (CSB)

"David went up in obedience to Gad's command, just as the Lord had commanded."

Trust God.

Another error we can make here is to want to try and clean ourselves up. We want to try and make it right ourselves so we don't have to accept God's Grace. If we don't look to God, and look to our own efforts, we're going to miss the only effective propitiation, there is no other.

David had something to do, so he went and did it. What is it that we have to do to clear our guilt? That's the major difference. Christ has done everything that needs doing to clear out guilt. David had to go and offer a sacrifice, for us, we need to stop trying to pay for our own sin, and to trust God's payment.

This is incredibly humbling. It is more costly to do this than it was for David to buy that piece of land. It requires admitting that our sin was so costly that there is nothing we can do to clear it. It means claiming the label "sinner". It means raising your hand and confessing I've done this. But trust God when he says, "it is finished."

Atonement

2 Samuel 24:25 (CSB)

He built an altar to the Lord there and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord was receptive to prayer for the land, and the plague on Israel ended.

Rest in God.

After David followed through in obedience to God's revealed propitiation, it was over. David's guilt was cleared, and that is why he can say things like "you have dealt with me according to my righteousness." Because he recognizes in the second half of that same psalm that it was God's work that had made him blameless. (See verse 33).

Had David committed serious sin? Yes. Did that sin have serious consequences? Yes. Was David righteous?

Yes.

Because of God's mercy, David was righteous. David trusted God's command to make the sacrifice. He had faith that that sacrifice cleared his debt. And he was able to rest in peace and joy with God, and approach him in prayer confidently.

And out of all the amazing ways David is an example of faith to us. This is the biggest one. We should follow David's example here.

Realize our sin is serious. Take sin seriously. See its serious consequences. Seek out God's revealed way of making it right, which is Jesus. And follow-through on his command – not to "build an altar" and "make a sacrifice" – but to trust in the sacrifice Jesus made for you. His own life on the cross.

Penance is not required for righteousness. Restitution might be required for justice, but penance is not required for righteousness.

Trust that his work makes you righteous. Trust that you have peace with him and can rest securely as a beloved Child of God.

And then go and show that same mercy, love, and forgiveness toward others who have sinned against you and are repentant.

Let's pray.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

For your community group.

1. David was aware that his conscience was bothering him with regard to his sin. How do you typically deal with your conscience when it is bothering you?
2. Since your community group is to be a place of openness and grace toward one another, it should be a safe place to confess unconfessed sin, and help one another, as Gad helped David, to know how to deal with that sin and find rest in trusting God's provided sacrifice for that sin. Take some time and pray silently and see how the Holy Spirit might guide you and your conscience to follow David's example here. Be like Gad to one another, point each other to Christ's atoning work on the cross.