

2 Samuel 24:1-25 | “His Mercy is Great!”  
*Preached on December 11, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Samuel 24, as we are on the last chapter of our 2 Samuel series, and what a great way that it ends, too. *[pause]*

It's said that, “They were looking for famous golf sayings to be inscribed in a specified area in the Golf Hall of Fame when it was under construction.

The first one selected is one of the most often-used expressions the game has produced. It's “Oh, no!”<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

Have you ever done something that you've regretted? *[pause]*

Some people regret not spending more time with someone.

Some people regret not going to college or something like that.

And still, others regret saying something they did or doing something that they shouldn't have done. *[pause]*

I'm sure each of us could give numerous examples of things that we regret doing or not doing. *[pause]*

Well in the story this morning, we find that David regrets something that he does as king.

But here's the thing: it's not simply a story of regret, but a story of redemption.

It's not just a story of a sinful mistake, but a story of supreme mercy.

For we will see that though David certainly regretted what he did, he also experienced the deep mercy of the Lord, too. *[pause]*

Let's see it for ourselves, as we begin READING in verse 1. *[READ VERSES 1-13]*

We find an interesting story here, for it raises numerous questions...

Why was the Lord angry with Israel?

How is it that God is said to “incite” David to number the people, and then punish him for doing so?

Why is numbering the people even wrong in itself? *[pause]*

Let's take them one by one.

First, why is God angry with Israel?

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<sup>1</sup> Found at: <https://bible.org/illustration/golf-sayings>. Original from: *Bits & Pieces*, January 5, 1995, p. 2.

We don't know, but it has to do with some sort of sin and covenant breaking on their part.  
[pause]

Second, why is God said to incite David to number Israel, and then punish him for it?

This certainly makes it *sound* almost like God tempted David to sin, but that can't be the case because James 1:13 says that God never tempts anyone. [pause]

So then what's the solution?

Well in 1 Chronicles 21 we find this story given there as well, and there are a few details that are different from the story recounted here. [pause]

One of them is given in verse 1, for there in Chronicles it says, "Then *Satan* stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel." [pause]

So here we are told that the Lord incited David, but in Chronicles, it says that Satan incited David.

How do we reconcile the difference? [pause]

Here's how I believe it can be reconciled...

Because of Israel's sin, God didn't prevent Satan from getting to David, but allowed Satan to tempt him greatly.

In this way, God is in no way actually tempting David, but is simply letting Satan do what he does, and David gives into the temptation like often sinful men do. [pause]

In this way, the author of 2 Samuel 24 can in a sense say that the Lord played a part in this incitement.

But in no way did God force David to sin, for David even confesses that he sinned greatly.  
[pauseeee]

Now let me answer the third question: how is numbering the people even wrong?

We aren't told explicitly, but we are given hints in this passage. [pause]

David says to number the people, "so that I may know the number of the people."

So David wants to know how many fighting men he has, but what would be the purpose of that?

Is it just curiosity? Nope.

It's most likely a prideful thing, whereby David wants to see how many fighting men he has to determine how mighty the nation is.

Joab even said that the Lord could add more people to Israel, so why number the people? *[pause]*

Essentially, it's a way to trust in human strength and numbers.

It's like sitting there counting your money in order to see how rich you are and so that you end up trusting in your wealth. *[pause]*

Once David finds out the number of men he has, then it could be this whole thing of, "Wow, our numbers make us so strong and capable of winning more victories."

But is that the way Israel was supposed to function - trusting in their own numbers?

No way - for the battle belongs to the Lord,<sup>2</sup> and He has proven time and time again that the victory doesn't depend on the amount of men they have fighting.

He is supposed to be their confidence and trust, not their numbers. *[pauseeee]*

In what ways do you trust in numbers or your strength?

Are you continually counting your money, and thinking, "OK, *now* I know I'm secure."

Where are you showing that your trust lies? *[pause]*

This is an important thing to remember as a church, especially as we have a business meeting coming up after the service.

We will look at the numbers today, and the numbers show that we are doing better financially than in previous years.

But what should be our thinking when we see that?

Should we pridefully look at that, and think "Look at what we have!"?

Should we trust in that? Should we feel secure and rest in ease because of that?

No, no matter how much or how little money we have on any given year, our trust should always be in the Lord!

We live by faith, not by sight of numbers. *[pause]*

That's why for this upcoming budget year, we as your leaders are recommending that because of more coming in, then we should live by faith, with more going out.

Not in foolishness or frivolous spending, but for God and His kingdom. *[pause]*

We don't hoard for ourselves in order to feel more secure and trust in a bank account number, but we are to always live by faith, trusting that God will provide.

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<sup>2</sup> A reference to 1 Samuel 17:47.

Our preservation doesn't lie in our strength or wealth, but in God's almighty power! *[pauseee]*

You see, we may not number our fighting men like David, but we number other things, and it's so easy to number things, so that you end up trusting in whatever you count.

But let's trust our Lord, who owns all things already! *[pauseee]*

So Joab and the commanders of the army go and number the people, and return with the figures to David.

But what happens when he hears the numbers?

David's heart strikes him, so that he confesses to the Lord, and he asks for forgiveness. *[pause]*

David didn't need a prophet to confront him with his sin this time like he did with the Uriah/Bathsheba incident.

Rather, right away, he is convicted of his sin. *[pause]*

David was showing a growth in his sensitivity to sin.

And that's what happens the more we grow closer to God: we actually see our sin more clearly and quickly. *[pause]*

But isn't David's actions here such a clear picture of what repentance looks like?

Anytime that we sin, we should be convicted of it, and think, "I have sinned greatly." *[pause]*

So often we take our sin lightly, and act like it wasn't that big of a deal, but a godly person is someone who knows that their sin is great.

But they are also someone who knows where to go when they sin - to the Lord. *[pause]*

Thankfully for us, our sin has been taken away by Christ, and we can rest in the forgiveness He has provided, but still we confess that we did wrong.

Like David, we don't cower away in guilt and shame, rather, we know to approach God, and confess our sin, and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin.<sup>3</sup> *[pause]*

You see, what made David such a godly person wasn't that he was sinless and perfect, for he wasn't perfect, as we have been seeing.

Rather, what made David such a godly man was his willingness to confess his sin and look to God for forgiveness. *[pause]*

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to 1 John 1:9.

And that's the truth - the godliest people are those who see their sin for what it is, and are repentant people. *[pause]*

Are you a person who is readily repentant? Or do you rarely confess your sin, if ever? *[pauseeee]*

In response, God sends David's seer, who was sort of like a prophet, to go to David and give him three options.

And these three options are sorta like "pick your poison," for they are all bad in some way. *[pause]*

The options are 3 years of famine, 3 months on the run from enemies, or 3 days of pestilence. *[pause]*

It seems as though the less time, the more severe it is.

But just think about the fact that God gave him options and even limited the time for each.

That's mercy in itself!

God didn't have to give him options or limit the punishments for each, for He could have just told him exactly what the punishment was, but our God is a merciful God. *[pauseeee]*

So as we consider verses 1-13, we see...

### **I. The Lord's sovereign mercy. (1-13)**

We see his sovereignty in that He is in control and at work in all things, even this one.

But we also see His sovereignty in that He allows Satan to incite David to number the people. *[pause]*

God was actually using Satan for his own purposes of judgment on His own people.

And this reminds us that Satan can only work by divine permission! He's always on a leash. *[pause]*

"OK," you may say, "but how is this sovereign *mercy*?"

Well because God sovereignly used this incident to confront David and Israel with their sin.

He didn't do this to get back at them and be mean to them, but He wanted to root out their sin and to grow them!

He wanted their relationship with him to be restored and for there not to be any further separation.

And then He even mercifully gives David options to choose from when it comes to the consequences of his sin. *[pauseee]*

This reminds us that any time that God confronts us with our sin, it is abundant mercy!

In discipline, He is treating us as sons!<sup>4</sup>

He loves us and wants the best for us.

He wants us to grow and for there to be nothing disturbing our fellowship with Him.

May we always remember that! *[pauseeee]*

In His sovereign mercy, the Lord presides over the whole judgment of David and Israel.

And that showed not only the Lord's sovereignty, but it also meant mercy would be shown, and that's David's hope as he responds to the three options and says in verse 14...

"I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man." *[pause]*

*Right there in verse 14, we see...*

## II. The Lord's reliable mercy. (14)

Even in judgment for his sin, David clings to the mercy of God. *[pause]*

David's sin and punishment didn't lead David to run away from God, but to draw near. *[pauseeee]*

So often people feel the weight of their sin and guilt before God, and it causes them to withdraw from Him. *[pause]*

I was talking to a couple one time who were going through a tough time, and they said, "Maybe it's best that we stop going to church because of what's going on in our lives."

And I said something like, "No, no. Going to church is what you need! We don't come to church because we have it all together, we come because we *don't* have it together. None of us do." *[pause]*

We don't withdraw from God and His people because of our sin, but rather, we press in further!

We need Him, and we need each other! *[pauseeee]*

David was faced with a tough decision, and even admits that he's in great distress over what was to come, but what does he do?

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<sup>4</sup> A reference to the teaching of Hebrews 12:7-11.

He says, “Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.” *[pause]*

He knew that sinful mankind does not have much mercy. *[pause]*

When people encounter an enemy, they tend to show no mercy.

Or just think about the ‘cancel culture’ that is so prevalent in our country.

Is there mercy there?

Certainly not, for when one thing is found in someone’s past or one thing is said that’s wrong in their eyes, they are *merciless*.

The judgment is decided right away - you are canceled. *[pause]*

Does David really want to be in the hands of people like that? No way! *[pauseeee]*

A vast difference between sinful man and God is mercy.

So many times people view God as a merciless God, and act as though He’s almost less merciful than us, but that couldn’t be farther than the truth!

There is a gap as wide as the universe between our mercy and His!

That’s why David chooses to fall into the hands of the Lord because he knows without a shadow of a doubt that God’s mercy is great! *[pause]*

Where else could David turn, but the mercy of God?

There he knows that mercy won’t run dry! *[pause]*

David knew that he had sinned greatly, he was in great distress, and the Lord’s mercy was great. *[pause]*

Do you fall on the mercy of God?

Humbly and trustfully falling into the hands of the Lord is always the better place to be in than anything else. *[pause]*

Don’t act like He’s a God set out to get you, but remember that His mercy is great!

Go to Him, and you will find a Father full of mercy.

In fact, He has already shown us the greatest display of mercy on the Cross.

For we were His enemies, yet He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place so that we could be forgiven and given eternal life. *[pause]*

His mercy is reliable, you can always count on that. *[pauseeee]*

So the three options of punishment were given, and now we will see the punishment carried out in verses 15-17. *[READ VERSES 15-17]*

The three days of pestilence are the judgment given, and God sends an angel to execute it.

In those few short days, 70,000 people die - that's a lot of people in a short amount of time. *[pause]*

This really goes right after David's sin, doesn't it?

David had numbered the people, and now God takes their number down by 70,000 in 3 days. *[pauseeee]*

But notice something in verse 16...

As the angel gets to Jerusalem, God relents and tells him to stop.

That right there is restraining mercy!

*In fact, it shows us...*

### III. The Lord's compassionate mercy. (15-17)

The Lord could have just continued on and let Jerusalem be hit with the pestilence, but out of compassionate mercy, the Lord relents.

In wrath he remembered mercy!<sup>5</sup> *[pause]*

David was right to not choose an option and to lean on God's great mercy, for God showed mercy! *[pause]*

He is so compassionate!

In His mercy, He doesn't treat us as we deserve, but He is compassionate with us. *[pause]*

He saw Jerusalem and was moved to stop the pestilence from continuing further.

And amidst this event, David sees the angel coming and says, "Behold, 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." *[pause]*

What a picture of Christ!

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<sup>5</sup> A reference to Habakkuk 3:2.



David is this picture of Christ, who steps in to take the punishment, but the major difference is that David sinned, while Christ never sinned. *[pause]*

But did you notice anything else related to Christ here with David?

David calls the people ‘sheep’, and offers to take the punishment upon himself alone rather than them. *[pause]*

Remind you of anything?

What about John 10:11 where Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”? *[pause]*

That’s what Jesus did for us, but He was completely innocent and we were completely guilty.

When we were facing condemnation and judgment, Jesus stepped in for His sheep and took the punishment that we deserved upon Himself.

He died on the Cross, so that we wouldn’t have to face the wrath of God for our sin.

In that way, we not only have a compassionate Father, but a compassionate Savior, Jesus Christ. *[pauseeee]*

After the Lord halts the angel from going on into Jerusalem, we see what happens next in verses 18-25. *[READ VERSES 18-25]*

*Here we see...*

#### **IV. The Lord’s forgiving mercy. (18-25)**

God sends David’s seer to tell him to raise an altar there at the threshing floor where the angel of the Lord stopped.

So David does as the Lord commanded. *[pause]*

He goes to the threshing floor, and that’s when Araunah, the owner of the threshing floor, talks with David. *[pause]*

Araunah finds out why he’s there, and offers to provide everything, but David declines the gracious offer.

He does so because he can’t just give to God what cost him nothing. *[pause]*

This just shows the character of David.

He could have easily just taken the threshing floor without asking, for he was the king, and could have said, “Hey, we need this land to stop the plague.”

Or he could have just taken the land for free since it was offered to him, but he doesn't.

He knows that a sacrifice has to actually cost you something or else it's not a sacrifice.

He is truly a man after God's own heart.<sup>6</sup> *[pauseeee]*

So David buys the threshing floor, builds the altar, offers the sacrifices, and the Lord stops the plague completely. *[pauseeeee]*

Just think about what the Lord did here in this section...

The Lord actually initiated and directed David in how to make things right. *[pause]*

But isn't that just like what He did through Christ?

He initiated, directed, and accomplished the atonement that was needed for us to be reconciled to Him. *[pauseeee]*

So often when we get offended by someone else, we think, "They need to figure out a way to make things right."

Yet here is God, in His forgiving mercy, telling David exactly what to do to make things right. *[pause]*

What a God of forgiving mercy!

He provides the way to be forgiven *and* the forgiveness. *[pause]*

Rest in the forgiveness that your merciful God has given through Christ!

You don't have to keep raising altars like David, but the altar was raised on Calvary, and the sacrifice offered once and for all so that the judgment has been averted forever. *[pause]*

*You can receive this precious forgiveness by simply trusting in Christ's sacrifice that was offered on your behalf. [pauseeee]*

**The Lord's mercy is great!**

He has *sovereign* mercy - nothing will prevent Him from showing you mercy, if He chooses to. *[pause]*

He has *reliable* mercy, so you never have to worry if He won't be merciful anymore, but you can rest in His merciful hands. *[pause]*

The Lord has *compassionate* mercy, so you can know that He cares for you. *[pause]*

And He has *forgiving* mercy, for in Christ, He has mercifully forgiven us of our sins. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>6</sup> A reference to 1 Samuel 13:14.

As our series in 2 Samuel wraps up, we are once again reminded that David's life wasn't perfect, as we saw him sin and fail.

**But He knew He had a God, whose mercy was great and He turned to Him. *[pause]***

As you live your life, you will probably sin and fail, but always remember that you have a loving Heavenly Father, whose mercy is great.

**Run to Him and cling to the mercy of God.**

In our biggest failures, and in our hardest situations, we will also say, "I'm in great distress," but we don't end there, for we say like David, "I'll leave it with the Lord, for His mercy is great."