

## Count on It: David

Ash Wednesday – 02/22/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Chron. 21:1-2, 7-19, 26-27 Past. Keith Besel

v.17, **“David said to God, ‘...It is I who have sinned and done great evil. ... Please let Your hand, O LORD my God, be against me and against my father's house.’ ....”**.

### **Introduction**

✘ King David is often considered to be the greatest monarch in Israel's history. He wasn't the first king – that was Saul – but David is the one that established the kingdom that would last for centuries. He followed the LORD, wrote many psalms, and 1 Samuel 13:14 says that he was “a man after [God's] own heart”.

→ During this Lenten season, we will meet and consider the so-called “good kings” of Judah who sat on the David's throne in Jerusalem. Their lives and deeds are recorded for us in the book of 2 Chronicles.

→ But tonight, on Ash Wednesday, we begin in 1 Chronicles with the first king over God's royal house.

### **I. Great King David was far from perfect**

✘ Of course, although he was the first model of a good king in Judah, David was far from perfect. Even while he is known for his many great deeds, perhaps he is most famous for the enormity of his sins and their far-reaching consequences. I'm guessing that we are all familiar with his adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah. His cry of repentance over those sins is recorded in Psalm 51:3 “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me”.

→ The significance of these evil actions made a lasting impression on the rest of David's reign. It led David's son Absalom into a rebellion that destabilized the kingdom David had worked so hard to establish.

→ That's typical, whenever a nation experiences turmoil for rivals to try to use it for their advantage. Judah was no exception; but David puts down the rebellion, fights off the Philistines, and survives another attempted coup.

### **II. David's sin: relying on armies**

✘ But that leaves the kingdom of Israel, and David's reign, in a delicate position. So, like any savvy king, David wanted to know what his military strength truly was. And this opened the door for Satan, as verse one says, to come at him with a temptation that both stroked David's ego and prompted him to rely entirely on the size of his army.

→ To that end David ordered a census of all his fighting men. Like Scrooge McDuck or the king of “four-and-twenty blackbirds” fame, both who loved to count their money, David placed his trust in the number of soldiers he could call for battle.

✘ But, before we hurt ourselves pointing the accusatory finger at David, perhaps we should take a glance at our own lives. For when you and I face uncertainty, what do we do? We take a quick look at our bank accounts in order to figure out how long they're going to hold up. And if it's not money, we are still tempted to put our trust in the things of this world: our health, our friends, our position in society or how we're doing professionally; trying to calculate our chances for survival and success. And far too many people today also depend upon our political leaders or the American economy or military to provide comfort in times of uncertainty.

✘ While you and I might think a simple census is not such a big deal, both Satan and God knew exactly how big of a deal it was – a blatant violation of the First Commandment. Even David, in verse 17 later calls it “great evil”. Indeed, anytime that you or I lean on our own strength and understanding, it’s not simply a faux pas or mistake; it is a great evil.

→ That’s one of the worst parts of our very nature as sinners – to rely upon ourselves, our possessions, and the things God has given to us instead of God Himself.

→ In fact, if you want to see how truly great these evils are, just look at how very great the punishment is that God inflicts as a result. Throughout this sermon series we will see that the sins of the king are not simply personal matters. We see this in our own lives today as well; how often a private person’s sin negatively affects the people around him. And when it comes to the king, the actions of that one man often have national, even worldwide, repercussions. God shows us throughout the books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles how the sins of the king are visited upon his people as well.

✘ Tonight, in verse 11, The LORD, uses the prophet Gad to offer David three choices-of-threes: 1<sup>st</sup> - three years of famine, 2<sup>nd</sup> - three months of losing war, or 3<sup>rd</sup> - three days of pestilence. No matter the choice, a price will be paid in blood. What a terrible choice for a king to make! Israel had already endured three years of famine during the days of David, and David knew war far too well. No matter the choice, the burden of David’s sin would end up on his people.

→ So David pleads to God for the people in verse 17: “Was it not I who gave command to number the people? It is I who have sinned and done great evil. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand, O LORD my God, be against me and against my father’s house. But do not let the plague be on Your people”.

→ How sad that the king who began his life as a shepherd ends up leading his own people into slaughter when he should have been the one to protect them.

### **III. David chose to fall in the LORD’s hand**

✘ Given these three options, David refuses to make the choice. He decides that he will submit himself to God’s wrath. He says in verse 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”. As a show of faith, with a repentant heart, David finally places his trust in God’s goodness in spite of his sin. He places himself “into the hand of the LORD”.

→ Friends, as sinners ourselves, there’s no better place for us to be when we find ourselves in sorrow over the evil we have done, than to firmly stand at the mercy of God. Luther instructs us in the Small Catechism, “We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment” (SC, Fifth Petition). Yes, we pray, “forgive us our trespasses”; in those words we pray for God’s mercy and grace not because we deserve them but because our Father has asked us to pray this way. At the time of our text, David, and by extension the people of Israel, must be taught that armies and the strength of men come and go according to God’s perfect will, not at the will of mankind.

### **IV. The LORD’s mercy is very great**

✘ Make no mistake, the punishment was very great, as 70,000 men of Israel were killed by the plague in just a few days (and that likely did not include many more women and children who died as well). That’s approximately 20,000 more than the number of deaths during the three-day Battle of Gettysburg. As a result, David now had no choice but to rely on the LORD for the strength and protection of the nation.

- And did you see? It could have been far worse. But when the angel reached Jerusalem, verse 15 tells us that it was only out of God's great mercy that "the Lord saw, and He relented from the calamity". Saying, "It is enough!"
- Still David was told that a sacrifice of treasure and blood was required. So he bought the threshing floor of Ornan and offered up, oxen, wood, and grain. God answered these offerings with fire from heaven, and the angel sheathed his sword.
- Yes, David's choice to throw himself on the mercy of the LORD was the wise and right choice, for even as David did not deserve mercy, he still received it from the ever-gracious hand of God.
- ⊗ Later, in chapter 22:1 "David said, 'Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel'". This very site became the place of Solomon's temple, where blood was shed day after day and year after year for the sins of the people. However, as God teaches in His Word, all the blood of goats and bulls could not wash away the stain of sin. No sackcloth and ashes could ever cover the sinful flesh that you and I still bear. Israel relied, just as we still do today, on the great mercy of God to put His sword away.
- Yet for the sake of God's purity and truth the sword could not yet be sheathed forever; a victim was still needed for the final payment. David's price of 600 shekels could not even repay his debt, let alone the sin of the entire world. This great king of Israel had brought destruction upon his people that he was powerless to stop.
- ⊗ And so Israel was bound to wait for a far greater king. All of God's people yearned for a king worthy enough to bring redemption, not destruction. When Jesus, the Son of David entered Jerusalem, He was glorified as the true and final King of Israel (Jn. 12:13). From His Baptism in the Jordan until He entered Jerusalem on a colt, Jesus "took our illnesses and bore our diseases" (Mt. 8:17). Only Jesus was able to stay the hand of death and reverse its course. His was, and is, the only innocent body, making Him the only One capable of carrying our infirmities into the royal city.
- This righteous King was anointed to bring good news to the poor and free the oppressed. Jesus saw the needs of His people and, like a shepherd, He had compassion on them. He fed them out of the abundance of God's grace and gathered them into one flock. All of this Jesus did in obedience to God's will and plan. He counted the cost of following the Lord, and then He carried His cross to the end.
- ⊗ Jesus saw that His people had fallen into every kind of sin and transgression. And as their King; as our King He knew that He would have to die Himself for His people, not us for Him. Yes, the terrible price of sin fell upon the Shepherd, because the sinful sheep were helpless to do a thing.
- So it is that this King; the greater Son of David, established the Kingdom of God's great mercy. It was only when this King declared, "It is finished," that He announced our liberty from sin. This Son of David accomplished these things by His mighty power; baring His arm as the true protector of His people. The cost was great, but the victory was even greater for the people of His kingdom.

## **V. Jesus: the very great King of Israel**

- ⊗ King David, sinful man though he be, is remembered as the great king of the united kingdom of Israel; the one who established a great kingdom of strength. But far more important, King David is the sinner who called out in faith to God; trusting in God's mercy above all else. And so he teaches you and me to do the same.

→ However the Son of David, did so much more. Jesus' eternal kingship is not based on the might of men and their arms, but on the mercy of God. Jesus' heart was set on our salvation; He gave His life for the sins of His people.

✘ So tonight, as we remember that "we are dust and to dust we shall return" we rely on the mercy of God. We cry out to our King for clean hearts. For in His death, Jesus has established the throne of His father David forever. He is the greater King who poured out His blood for the forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of His grace. You can count on it. Amen.