

## **“REFLECTIONS ON PLAGUE AND PESTILENCE, II.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**April 26, 2020, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: II Samuel 24**

**Prayer:**

### **Introduction.**

I am finding my study of II Samuel to be a fruitful blessing and the more I dig into it the more I am amazed at how relevant and timely it is for us in the midst of this Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, so much so that I realized the end of this chapter which I was going to skip is also timely, so we will take that up next week. I hope you will read and pray over and meditate on this chapter and what God would say to us through it.

Let me recap briefly the three points we covered last week.

**First, God is behind these events and working through them, God is in control.**

**II Samuel 24:1** Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”

We tremble before a holy God who’s anger is righteous and just, and who uses agents like Satan and a king’s census to accomplish His perfect and mysterious will.

There is no part of this God is not involved in, even the sinful actions of rulers.

Remember that favorite passage, II Chronicles 7:14. In one of my devotions that I emailed to you a week ago I cited that passage. Most of us know verse 14, but consider verse 13.

**II Chronicles 7:13-14** When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, 14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

**Isaiah 45:7** I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.

**Amos 3:6** Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?

Why do I continue to emphasize this? Because we will not have any hope of rightly discerning what is going on if we don’t rightly understand the sovereign God behind it all.

**Second, we paused for a moment to notice the 70,000 who died.**

That is a lot of suffering, a lot of heartache, a lot of grieving. God has an entirely different view of suffering than we do. It is part of a bigger purpose. God is more interested in holiness than our happiness, because holiness leads to a greater and longer term happiness, eternal joy.

In God's universe suffering is always meaningful, purposeful.

This is most evident in the suffering of Jesus. That greatest of all suffering was the most meaningful, purposeful thing to ever happen. It was for the salvation of our souls, for the propitiation of the Father's wrath, for the forgiveness of our sins, for the reconciliation to the Father.

Why do I continue to emphasize this? Because without a good theology of suffering we won't be able to make sense of much that happens in our world and in our own lives (see II Cor 4:17).

### **Third, we noticed the extent of the suffering, from Dan to Beersheba.**

I talked about the solidarity of our suffering, that we in America are not exempt. We are all feeling the pain in some way. This changes our perspective, this changes our prayers, this helps us weep with those who weep. This wakes us up that God is trying to get *all* of our attention.

For the remainder of our time this morning and next week I want to focus on King David, his actions are instructive.

### **Fourth, David's sin and his response to God's discipline.**

The underlying and overarching problem here is a spiritual problem, and the only hope in this situation is a spiritual solution.

#### ***The people of Israel have sinned and David has sinned.***

For Israel their sin was rebellion against God, of disobedience, of idolatry, putting other things ahead of God.

For David it was lack of faith and trust. He neglected his spiritual duties, not seeking and inquiring of the Lord, trusting armies and numbers more than trusting God.

His sin is our sin, trusting in our own resources, in our own ability to work and make money, in our own ability to have wealth and health and long life. It is pride, depending on the flesh, it is lack of faith.

#### ***Sin always has consequences.***

There is always a cost to sin. There is always a price to pay for following Satan. He tries to make sure we never see that cost or think about it until afterwards.

There is a prayer we should pray often. “God, next time I am tempted to sin, enticed, seduced, lured, feeling the pull of some fleshly or carnal desire, remind me of the consequences, of the remorse that follows, the regret, remind me of the shame, guilt, soul sadness.”

We never sin just to ourselves, our sin ripples out. And often our sin harms those we would most want it not to, those close to us, those we love.

When leaders sin, the consequences spread out on to the people. Because of David’s sin, there were 70,000 grieving families, 70,000 families digging graves, suffering the loss of a loved one, a wage earner, their only source of a livelihood.

Sin is a form of pride, arrogance, that says this won’t hurt me, this won’t affect me, this won’t hurt my soul, this won’t have long term consequences or impact anyone else.

God gives us reminders all through Scripture of sin’s consequences and far reaching consequences, moving from the individual to families, tribes and whole nations. Consider Adam, Abraham, Lot, Achan in Jericho, and David.

### **The spiritual solution to sin is repentance.**

In less than three days 70,000 fell dead and Jerusalem was on the very brink of destruction.

David is a good king with a good heart. Once he sees his sin is the cause of the crisis, he takes responsibility. He sees the real problem and it is him and his sin, so he prays and asks for mercy.

This is a contrast to King Saul who when caught in sin, made excuses and blamed others. As a result he lost favor with God and lost his kingship and kingdom. How often is that our response to sin, to cover up or find a way out by blaming someone or something else?

David’s heart struck him and he confesses and he repents before God three times.

**II Samuel 24:10, 14, 17** But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

14 Then David said to Gad, “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.”

17 Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, “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.”

Notice he doesn’t beat around the bush, he calls his sin sin. He is honest, he calls it what it really is. This seems to me to be the hand of God. A person only truly confesses and repents by the leading of the Holy Spirit. The unspiritual don’t do spiritual things.

***What a remarkable turnaround.*** David went from not trusting God and taking a census, to totally trusting God and accepting whatever punishment God chose. He trusts God's mercy.

Notice David's doctrine of God. David has good theology and there is no better time to have that than in the darkest time, in the times of greatest crisis. He knows God is a God of ***just wrath*** and he knows God is a God of ***great mercy***. In the midst of wrath, David entrusts himself to God's mercy.

God is not either/or, He is both/and. In the midst of our sin and our Father's loving discipline, is it not a great help and source of hope to know that God is good, gracious, merciful, compassionate? Remember what Moses saw when God revealed His glory to him?

**Exodus 34:6-7** The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

What kind of God would you want to have running the universe? What kind of God would you want to have behind this virus? In the midst of our sin, whose hands do you want to commit yourself to?

**II Samuel 24:14** "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great."

In the midst of wrath, David entrusts himself to God's mercy.

Leaders act, leaders take responsibility, leaders do things for the sake of their people, for their spiritual security and safety and health. This is true at every level, in our homes, churches, communities, state and nation. It's true of kings and presidents, of governors and judges, of bosses and husbands, of parents and teachers and on and on.

This is what we should pray for regarding all of those over us. Can we imagine what a difference it would make in our lives if our leaders stopped blaming and took spiritual responsibility and lead our state and nation in repentance and prayer?

***There is a grave danger in this matter of repenting.***

That is not repenting and remaining in our sin. Let us not be like those spoken of in Revelation:

**Revelation 9:18-21** By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, ... 20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, 21 ***nor did they repent*** of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Times of judgment are times of repenting. What God is doing is a rescue operation, of trying to get our attention before we perish, before we drive off the cliff. This is a time for learning, for waking up, for shaking off our complacency, not complaining, not binging on Netflix, not just getting things done around the house, but for getting spiritual work done.

There are two responses: continue in sin, or repent.

If we remain in our sin, then we are filling up our sin for a greater judgment and we will be without excuse. If we say on the great day of judgment, “But God I didn’t know, no one warned me,” God will say, “Remember Covid-19?”

### **The blessing of faith in a sovereign and merciful God.**

In the midst of David’s great pestilence he remembered and turned to the mercy of God, and God was merciful to him and relented from further destruction.

We are in the hands of a merciful God who is even right now restraining and limiting what this virus could do.

For those who believe, they are firmly in the grasp of Jesus. With Job we can say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust him.” However hard it is for you right now, put yourself in God’s hands.

We worship a God of compassion and mercy which relieves much fear, and gives much security.

**Psalm 103:8-14** The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

This is the profound blessing of knowing our God and seeing how merciful He is, how great His love for us in Christ Jesus, how far He goes to save us, how He doesn’t treat our sin.

### **Implications and application.**

David sets an example for how we should respond to the loving fatherly discipline of God.

Now is a time for taking God more seriously than we ever have. Now is a time for confessing, turning from our evil, repenting, seeking the mercy of God, sacrificing.

The way to God's heart is repentance and faith. In the light of His mercy, why would we resist His mercy, why would we not turn quickly. Let's be about the serious work of killing sin, not indulging in more sin. Let us not be among those who are not turning away from evil.

I am sympathetic to those protesting, to those who are hurting seriously, but what if God's work isn't done and He is using stubborn leaders, what if hearts aren't yet humbled, but still clinging to sin and selfish living.

Now is the time for doing the spiritual equivalence of washing hands, wearing face masks, staying in. One reason for doing all of that is to do our part for the sake of others. So we should do our part spiritually and pray and cry out on behalf of others and our nation, and our leaders. Pray for sinners to repent, to turn.

Pray China repents of its treatment of Christians. Pray America repents of her great and many sins. Pray Nigeria repents in the face of a holy God.

To want to see this terrible disease and all these deaths stop and jobs to open up is a compassionate response and certainly one all Christians should pray for. But that is not the only thing we should pray for, that the pain stop and we get back to our normal lives.

This is God's judgment on our normal lives. This is God's judgment on our selfish existences, living for what we want. This is God's judgment on our ignoring and neglecting Him, on making God one thing among many things in our lives, rather than the main thing, for not loving Jesus more than anything else. This is God's judgment on thinking we can save ourselves, and that our comfortable lives are a sign that we are OK with God and His is OK with us.

Suffering exposes what is wrong and where the problem is. Suffering exposes the weakness of our flesh, that no human being or human government can even begin to fix what is broken in our world and in our souls. Salvation belongs to God.

Pray daily for each other, community, nation, world, leaders.

Pray for God's glory, God's will, God's purposes, salvation, repentance.

Holy Father, "Stretch forth your hand in great awakening for the sake of this perishing world. Let the terrible words of Revelation not be spoken over this generation: "Yet still they did not repent." As you have stricken bodies, strike now the slumbering souls. Forbid that they would remain asleep in the darkness of pride and unbelief. In your great mercy, say to these bones, "Live!" And bring the hearts and lives of millions into alignment with the infinite worth of Jesus" (John Piper).