

### *General Intro*

Good morning everyone. It is great to be here today. Last Monday it was five years since Jo and Caleb arrived here in Flaxmere. They came before I did as an advance guard to get things sorted for Caleb's schooling.

Five years can be quite a significant length of time, but five years can also be just a start and that is what this five years is for us. We are going to be here for many, many more years to come.

### *Intro to passage*

Today we are going to have another message from the life of David. One from the years when he was King. It is a story that is recorded in two different places 2 Samuel chapter 24 and 1 Chronicles chapter 21.

Today I will be telling the passage as a story, and using the account in 1 Chronicles chapter 21 as a foundation for this.

### *Prayer*

Let us pray...

### *Story*

David was getting on a bit now; he was older than I am now, so that means that he was older than middle aged. David was king and had been king for some time. There had been some rebellions over the years that had needed to be sorted out. But things were going well, there was justice throughout the country, the army was

successful – some of the great soldiers had become legends. It was a time when Israel was becoming formed and forged as a country. A great time in their history. Then out of nowhere David decided to have a census. What or who persuaded David to do that is a bit of a mystery, but he decided to do it. Now for us a census is a normal thing, it is part of what we do in New Zealand, we are going to have one this year. The number of people in the country will be counted and the numbers will be used to help with all sorts of planning. That is good and normal and part of what we do.

But in David's time it was just the number of men who were able to be in the army that were counted. So a census wasn't about schools, roads and hospitals and good things like that. A census was about working out how big you could make your army. And you don't need to know that if you are defending your land. You don't need to know that if you are trusting in God. You only need to know that if you are going to go out to attack someone and you are trusting in what you can see and count – a larger army and you are doing something that God has not asked you to do. And that is not good. But that was what David was doing as he asked for a census. David was stuffing things up. And it did not just slip by unnoticed.

Warning bells rang.

David had asked Joab and the commanders of the army, "to, number the fighting men in Israel" and Joab had replied to David, "May God multiply his people by hundreds! Don't they all belong to my master the king? But why on earth would you do a thing like this – why risk getting Israel into trouble with

God?” Joab reminded David that it was not right for him to work out how big he could make his army.

Bud David was the king, David knew what he wanted. He would not take no for an answer, and so he sent Joab off to do what he was told.

When Joab had finished he came back to Jerusalem and reported the results of the census to David. And God was offended by what had happened, what David had done. And God started punishing Israel, the whole country for David’s sin.

When that started to happen, David had one of those moments when he realized what he had done and the mistake he had made. And full of sorrow and regret he prayed to God, “I have sinned badly in what I have just done, I trusted in numbers not in you; forgive my sin-I’ve been really stupid.”

David made a huge mistake, he realized what he had done and he asked God to forgive him.

Now that I can understand, that is what we often do, but what happened next is difficult to comprehend. I am sure some of it happened because it was before Jesus came.

Since God answered David by speaking to Gad, a prophet and telling him “Go and give David this message; ‘God’s word: You have your choice of three punishments; choose one and I’ll do the rest.’” I do not know why God chose to do that.

So Gad delivered the message to David; “Do you want three years of famine, three months of running from your enemies while they chase you down, or three days of the sword of God-an epidemic unleashed on the country by an angel of

God” Think it over and make up your mind. What shall I tell the One who sent me?”

David responded “They’re all terrible! But I’d rather be punished by God whose mercy is great, than fall into human hands.” So God unleashed an epidemic in Israel-seventy thousand Israelites died.

But when God saw the destruction about to really get started, God changed his mind and called out to the death angel, “Enough’s enough! Pull back!” When that happened the angel had just reached the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David looked up and saw the angel hovering between earth and sky, sword drawn and about to strike Jerusalem. David and the elders with him were bowed in prayer, they had covered themselves with rough sacks and David was praying, “Please! I’m the one who sinned; I’m the one at fault. But these sheep, what did they do wrong? Punish me, not them, me and my family; don’t take it out on them.”

And God told David to go and build an altar on that very spot where the death angel had stopped. The threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. So David went over to meet with Araunah. Araunah who had also seen the angel. When David came up to meet him, Araunah bowed deeply before David, honoring the king. And David said to him, “Give me the site of the threshing floor so I can build an altar to God. Charge me the market price; we’re going to put an end to this disaster.”

“O Master, my king,”: said Araunah, “just take it’ do whatever you want with it! Look, here’s an ox for the burnt offering and threshing paddles for the fuel and wheat for the meal offering-it’s all yours!” Take it, have it for free.”

But King David said to Araunah, “No’ I will buy them for the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, and I am not going to offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

So David bought the whole place from Araunah for six hundred shekels of gold. He built an altar to God there and sacrificed Whole Burnt Offerings and Peace Offerings. He called out to God and God answered by striking the altar of the Whole Burnt Offering with lightning. And God told the death angel to put his sword back into its sheath.

*David: what it meant for him – legacy*

David was someone who made mistakes. He wasn’t perfect, he stuffed up. He ignored good advice, David sinned.

But David was also someone who knew how to sort things out with God. To be reconciled, to say sorry, to truly repent.

Over the last couple of weeks Lance Armstrong has had his interview with Oprah. He had admitted taking drugs, he has admitted cheating, and he has admitted being a bully. He has said that he is sorry, but there are consequences for him. And what happens in the next few years and how he handles those things that will determine how he is remembered and his legacy.

But for David, because of how he sorted things out with God, because of the attitudes he showed, people continued to look up to him. He was described by God as “my servant David”, and held up as an example of being God’s servant through the tough years of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. For a Psalm to be a Psalm of David is a high honour.

Jesus was often held up as the ‘son of David’ a title of respect throughout the gospels.

David left a real positive legacy he was remembered well. Even though he made mistakes, David also sorted things out with God.

He showed a real compassion for others and a concern for their welfare.

It is a great leader who says

“Please! I’m the one who sinned; I’m the one at fault. But these sheep, what did they do wrong? Punish me, not them, me and my family; don’t take it out on them”

And then David also realized that there was a cost to putting things right. He said:

“I will not take for the Lord what is yours, and I am not going to offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

I am not going to offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.

David was not looking for a quick, free solution, an easy out.

It would have been so easy for him to just accept the gift, but he knew that there needed to be some cost on his part.

And because of what he did, that site the altar was built on became the place where the temple in Jerusalem was built. The space that symbolized the connection between God and man.

*What does that mean” for us*

*Time of grace... God does forgive ...*

Now what about us? What does this mean for us?

We make mistakes as well, God challenges us as well.

But we live in a time of grace. Jesus took our sins; Jesus was the sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus took our place.

We cannot earn forgiveness.

But the words of David

“I will not take for the Lord what is yours, and I am not going to offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” are still there for us today. They are words for us.

I will not sacrifice what belongs to someone else. Yes we can understand that, I will not take what is yours and give that to God, yes we agree with that.

But what does it mean about not sacrificing the things that cost us nothing?

Well it is not about money. It is about more than that.

Whenever we follow Jesus there are times when we are challenged. It may be about changing habits, it may be about repenting, saying sorry for what we have done, it may be about following new directions facing the future, doing things that God has called us to do but we are afraid of.

All of these things will cost us something. It is not about money, those are things that we cannot go to the shop and buy.

Instead it is about having the courage to face the problems, to face our fears.

To have the courage to ask for help and support for making changes in our lives.

### *Habits*

Habits, addictions are hard to break, if you could just click your fingers and they would be gone, well that would be simple – it would not cost, and it would not even really be a habit. But following what God has asked us to do, changing, can be costly. Facing our fears can be difficult. We need to have the courage to ask for help and support for making changes in our lives.

That is what it might cost us, what we might need to sacrifice to break habits and addictions that God has called us to do in our lives.

### *Repentance*

It was humbling for David to repent, to say he was sorry. You hear politicians making excuses for not saying that they were wrong and asking for forgiveness. And this was the King saying he stuffed up. That is costly. And while it is usually not appropriate to air messy things in public, this was a public mess that everyone knew about so it was right that everyone knew about David's repentance as well. That took courage for David.

We might need to have courage, to humble ourselves, to share with someone we trust in the right time and place about what we have done. We might need courage to face any consequences that could be there.

That is what it might cost us, what we might need to sacrifice to repent, to say we are sorry.

#### *New directions – future*

It is not easy facing new directions and the fears we might have about the future. God calls us to do things but we can be very afraid of them. Give years ago when I followed God's call to Flaxmere there were things that I was nervous about. There were things I needed to trust God for. Giving up a secure income. Leaving what I knew to move to somewhere that I did not know. Going through a time when I needed to drive over a 1000km per week. But it might not be physically moving, it might be doing new things. Talking to others about Jesus, inviting people to church. Doing things that stretch us, things that God has called us to do. Or you might be someone who likes new things, and God is calling you to be

faithful, to do the same things that you have been doing. Being regular and faithful in what you do.

God will be prompting you about whatever it is. And it might be something that stretches you, moves you outside your comfort zone. Since God stretches us, God stretches me, God has done that in the past and God continues to do that. And that can be uncomfortable.

That is what it might cost us, what we might need to sacrifice as we follow Jesus as we face new directions and what God has in store for us in the future.

We do not spend our lives just doing the things in life we most enjoy doing all day every day. That is not living. But woven in with sacrifice is joy. There are times of laughter and happiness. There is the joy of taking those steps of faith; there is the security of feeling the loving arms of God. There is the reassurance of other followers of Jesus.

That is why there needs to be a cost to the sacrifices we give to God. Why we cannot give that which costs us nothing.

And just like David found, the very ground and space where those things take place can become the ground and space where the temple is built – where we connect with God in a close and intimate way. That is my experience, that is my encouragement, that is my prayer.

*Prayer*

Let us pray.