

The Mystery of God's Wrath and Mercy – 2 Samuel 24 – Rev. Budy Setiawan

In the beginning of this chapter, there is a sense that an important thing has happened, however it is difficult to point a finger on what it is. In v1 we know that God is angry, but the Bible does not necessarily tell us why. However, the bigger mystery here is actually the fact that God incited David to do something only to show his wrath against it. David obeyed God to number the Israelites, however he was blamed for it, and he himself realised it was a sin. Interestingly, in its parallel verse in 1 Chronicles 21, it says, "Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel". This chapter tells the same story as 1 Samuel 24, but with a few *different* details. When we compare these two accounts it may start to feel confusing - who then was the one that incited David to count the Israelites? Was it Satan, or God? How can both Satan and God do the same thing?

Ultimately, we cannot know how these two verses are intertwined. We know that God doesn't *cause* someone who *doesn't want* to sin, to sin. We also know that if God doesn't *allow* our sin to come to pass, then that sin will *not* come to pass. But here God did not merely *allow* this sin to occur, God *incited* David to commit it. God was then wrathful towards Israel and used David's sin to make known his wrath - and we don't know why. Does this fact make you feel a bit uneasy? Or maybe disturb you?

This is exactly the first lesson we can learn from the passage today - that there are many things we cannot understand. Isaiah 55:9 says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts". God knows everything about us - our desires, our thoughts, our sins - all of it. We also know that while God incited David and was wrathful towards it, God is not sinning because to sin is utterly against his own nature. In Romans 11:33, Paul said "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" This inability to understand should not cause us to leave God, but rather to praise Him for His grand and mysterious ways. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:36)

The second lesson we can learn today is about the mystery of God's mercy (v10-19). In response to David's sin, God sent the prophet Gad with three consequences that David had to choose would befall on Israel. David's answer in v14 is beautiful and important. He said "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." While David knew that God was wrathful towards his sin, he still had faith in God's everlasting love. God executed his wrath and 70,000 men from Dan to Beersheba died. However, David's knowledge of God's mercy is proven in v16 - "And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

David knew that God in His anger would still be a God full of great mercy, and this should also be a great comfort for us. Where do we run to in times of crisis? What is our first instinct when we face troubles in life? Are we trying to find our own solutions, or like David do we say, "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great". Sometimes we see God's mercy as a mere "exception" and not as an attribute. However let us come to God even though He is full of wrath towards our sin, as in the midst of that wrath He is a Lord who is faithful and loving, compassionate, and with great mercy. He doesn't deal with us according to our sin or repay us according to our iniquity.

The last lesson that we can learn from this chapter is about the necessity of atonement (v20 – 25). In v17, even though it was God who stopped the angel and thus the pestilence stopped, God's wrath was not actually over. God then sent Gad back to David so that he could raise an altar to the Lord. David knew that in raising up that altar, there must be a sacrifice presented and that this was the only way to appease God's wrath. God who is full of mercy, was actually the one who provided this path - foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus, our Lord who died on the cross did not just stop the power of sin, but that sacrifice itself was provided by God to atone for the sin of his people. God's wrath for our sin is a holy and righteous wrath and that wrath must be executed. If it is not, it would be against His own holy nature. Sin must be punished, and so the death of Christ bore the sin of man. However it did more than that, God's wrath was appeased when it was poured out to Christ on the cross. He was on the cross because the Father surrendered Him to die on the cross. This too, is a great mystery. This, is the greatest love. One that we cannot fully understand. This, is the mystery of God's mercy towards mankind.