

25. No Cheap Grace

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[0 : 00] Well, now we're going to turn to our reading for this evening. You'll find that in the second book of Samuel, 2 Samuel and chapter 21.

I think that's page 273, 273 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles. And last Sunday evening we were looking particularly at chapter 19, although into chapter 20, about the return of King David back to Jerusalem after the rebellion of Absalom.

And so now we pick up the story in chapter 21 at verse 1. Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year.

And David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said, there is blood guilt on Saul and on his house because he put the Gibeonites to death. So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them.

Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.

[1 : 28] And David said to the Gibeonites, what shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement that you may bless the heritage of the Lord? The Gibeonites said to him, it's not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house.

Neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel. And he said, well, what do you say that I shall do for you? They said to the king, the man who consumed us and planned to destroy us so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us so that we may hang them before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen one of the Lord.

And the king said, I will give them. But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son, Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan, the son of Saul.

The king took the two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth, and the five sons of Merad, the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel, the son of Barzillai, the Mahathalite, and he gave them to the hands of the Gibeonites.

And they hanged them on the mountain before the Lord, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of the barley harvest. Then Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock from the beginning of harvest until the rain fell upon them from the heavens.

[3 : 06] And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day or the beasts of the field by night. When David was told what Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jashigilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them on the day the Philistines killed Saul and Gilboa.

And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan. And they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin and Zela in the tomb of Kish, his father.

And they did all that the king commanded. And after that, God responded to the plea for the land. There was war again between the Philistines and David.

And David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. And Ishbi Benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed 300 shekels of bronze and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David.

But Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. And David's men swore to him, You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of

Israel.

[4 : 32] After this, there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibachai, the Hush, the Hight, struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants.

And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. And Elhanan, the son of Jar-Erejem, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath, the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number.

And he also was descended from the giants. And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan, the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down. These four were descended from the giants in Gath. And they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. Amen. May God bless to us this, his word.

[5 : 37] Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 274, the passage that was read to us, and we'll have a moment of prayer as we turn to the word of God.

Let's pray. Father, as we turn from the praising of your name to the preaching of your word, we know that there are things that you have to say to us, things that we need to hear.

And so lead us through this passage, and lead us in that passage to the living word, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Amen. I don't know if you, like me, are fond of reading biography. I find biography an absolutely fascinating type of reading.

And one of the interesting things in a biography is where the biography finishes. Now, obviously, if it's a person who's dead, it finishes at the person's death.

[6 : 36] Or if it's a person still living, then clearly it's going to be at the significant point that's been reached. But many biographies actually don't finish there.

What we have is a collection of other chapters summing up the individuals, summing up their importance. For example, I've got several books on Shakespeare which tell us the little that is known about Shakespeare's life.

And then you have chapters on Shakespeare's theatre, Shakespeare's contemporaries, Shakespeare's rivals. That's nonsense. And Shakespeare had no rivals. The others did their best. And chapters and chapters on the whole world from which he came.

Similarly with Churchill, a great deal is known about him, but there are many biographies which will talk about, say, Churchill the war leader, Churchill the parliamentarian. Now, we've come to a part in the book of Samuel, 2 Samuel, where we have four chapters which seem to me to do just that for David.

The conventional view of David goes something like this. David was great up till chapter 11, the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah.

[7 : 45] And then after that, everything was downhill. Now, we've looked at these stories, chapters 11 to 20, and of course, the sin that he committed and the judgment that God sent is worked out in his life.

But, when we come now to the end of 2 Samuel, these four chapters are going to look at tonight and the next three evenings. This is the spirit saying, look, this is the kind of man David was.

This is the final assessment of him. Well, it's not the final assessment. Of course, that comes in the New Testament. And there is a great deal about David in 1 and 2 Chronicles and also a little bit in 1 Kings.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that what the author is doing is he is saying, look, if you want to understand this great figure who has trod the stage, you have to look at these chapters.

There's just a word about how these chapters hang together. As the spirit gives his final perspective on David at the end of 2 Samuel, chapter 21, the chapter we read, begins with a famine and chapter 24 with a plague.

[9 : 02] So we have famine and plague, the results, of course, of the fall, the results of sin and the results of the curse working in creation.

Then we have warrior exploits like the ones we read at the end of this chapter and then again in chapter 23 where we read about David's champions. But in between, there is a great psalm of praise which we'll look at next week.

Psalm 22. Sorry, 2 Samuel 22 which is also Psalm 18 or more or less. And then there is the great oracle or prophecy of David described as the last words of David in chapter 23.

And it seems to me all these chapters are summed up by chapter 22, 51. Great salvation the Lord brings to his king and shows steadfast love, covenant love to his anointed, to David and to his offspring forever.

That's what we're going to be looking at as we don't know all the time. God's great faithfulness and David, God's flawed but faithful servant. the covenant and the grace of the covenant.

[10:15] Now I'm calling this sermon this evening No Cheap Grace. Now this, as far as I know, this was a phrase that was first used by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the brave German pastor and theologian who was murdered by Hitler.

This is what Bonhoeffer says. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance. It is grace without the cross.

It is the gospel without Jesus Christ. There is no such thing as cheap grace. Someone said, I don't know who said it first, that grace is free but it is not cheap.

Grace comes from the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we've seen often in these books of Samuel, where sin increased, grace abounded even more.

Where is from Romans chapter 5. So, grace here to those who repent and judgment for us all and those who will not repent. That's kind of background of the chapter.

[11:20] It seems to me this idea of no cheap grace, of costly grace, if you like, is the binding thread that holds the chapter together. And first of all, in verses 1 to 9, we have grace healing the past.

Grace can heal the past. The pessimistic poem the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam in the 19th century says, The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on.

For all thy piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line. For all thy tears wash out one word of it. Now that's true, but it's also true that grace forgives, that grace heals the past.

And what's happening here is that David is trying to deal with part of the dismal legacy of Saul. Not exactly sure when this happened.

Verse 7 says, The king spared Mephibosheth. Now we read about that back in chapter 9. So it's very probable this story falls somewhere into that period, round about 2 Samuel 9 and 10.

[12:33] Israel is suffering famine. And Israel is suffering famine because Saul has broken a covenant. Famine was one of the judgments promised for breaking the covenant.

Leviticus 24 and Deuteronomy 28. If the covenant is broken, one of the punishments is the land flowing with milk and honey will suffer famine.

And this goes back further still because he put the Gibeonites to death. Read this story in Joshua chapter 9. The Gibeonites came to Joshua, pretended they were not people of the land, but pretended they were from a far and distant country.

They came wearing old shabby clothes. They came with worn out shoes and so on. And Joshua granted them immunity. Now, Saul had violated this.

Verse 2. The king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them that the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn, had made a oath, made a covenant to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.

[13:47] Now, notice this phrase, in his zeal. Zeal in a wrong cause can be deadly. Faber, the Victorian hymn writer, writes this, we make his love too narrow by false limits of our own and we magnify his strictness with a zeal he will not own.

This is Saul. As we've gone through the books of Samuel, I think there's one thing we've noticed of Saul. Saul is an extremely religious person. He is a kind of religious fanatic, almost.

He has zeal, but zeal for the wrong thing. So, there are two things I want to notice here. First of all, the dreadful consequences of sin.

Sin brings not liberation and life. Sin brings destruction and death. Now, we've already seen this in chapter 11 to 20, haven't we? In the breakdown of anything like godly behavior in David's family, in the warring and the factions and so on.

But grace came to David because he repented. Why did grace come to David and not to Saul?

Because Saul did not repent. That is the point here.

[15:00] It's not whether Saul was a bigger sinner than David. It was that Saul would not admit he was a sinner. It was that Saul wanted his own way. Notice verse 2.

Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them. Saul's butchery had polluted the land. Numbers 35-33, you shall not pollute the land in which you live. He had violated a covenant promise. And remember, Saul is not just a private individual. Saul is the anointed king standing for the nation. So, the first thing to notice about this little episode here in verses 1-9 is the disastrous consequences of sin. Sin has consequences and they are always, always deadly. I want you to notice, secondly, the grace of the covenant. Notice verse 2, sorry, verse 1. David sought the face of the Lord. [16:08] That's the sign of grace in the story. Remember that when grace is at work, grace shows what is wrong in order that it can be put right.

How do we know the difference between the guilt feelings that come to us from our own temperament and personality and, of course, the temptations of Satan? Well, the Lord, when he reveals to us what is wrong, always shows us how to put it right. The Lord does not leave genuine seekers in the dark. That's the difference between the Lord and Satan, is it not? David seeks the Lord and the Lord gives him the answer and, of course, it is not cheap grace because, after all, there are going to be people killed and there's going to be sorrow and heartbreak. We might well think, and some of the commentators do say this, this runs counter to Deuteronomy 24, verse 16, which says, fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children for their fathers.

[17:18] But surely, the important thing is, and jumping on into the next section for a moment, at the end of verse 14, after that, God responded to the plea for the land.

If what David had done had been wrong, then God could scarcely have responded to the plea for mercy. Well, what about Deuteronomy 24, verse 16?

Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children for their fathers. Now, the point is, that law was to regulate individual cases.

That law was not a general blanket condition. You see, the point is here, Saul is not, as I said, a private individual.

Saul is the covenant leader who had violated the covenant, and therefore others had suffered, and David honors that covenant, and Saul does not.

[18:17] That's the point. And that's why verse 7 is so important. The king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son, Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan, the son of Saul.

way back in 1 Samuel 20, David had promised to show covenant love to Jonathan and to his house. He proves that by his faithfulness to Mephibosheth.

So you see, David, the covenant keeper, is contrasted to Saul, the covenant violator, the covenant breaker. And he sorts out the mess of the past.

That is the gospel, is it not? While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The blood that flowed at Calvary not only fits us for his presence, but blots out the past, doesn't it?

And only the blood of the covenant can do that. This is the gospel shining out as we've seen it so often here. This is not just an ancient story.

[19:23] This is covenant, mercy, healing the past, pointing to David's greater son, who protects his people, and no one can snatch his sheep out of his hand.

David cares for the people. Saul cares for his own self, his own cause, and his own desires, and his zeal is utterly godless.

That's the first thing then. Now the second episode here, grace shown in the costliness of human love, verses 10 to 14. Now this story flows from the broken covenant story, but it's a powerful little episode on its own.

This brave woman, verse 10, Rizpah the daughter of Ai, took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, beginning of harvest, until the rain fell from the heavens. She defended the bodies, she defended them against predators, defended them against the weather, and it's a powerful and poignant little story.

You know, there's no way this story can be made pleasant. We mustn't sentimentalise this story and say, oh, we need to be like Rizpah and carry out ministries of kindness. Well, of course, ministries of kindness matter, but that's not what this story is about.

[20 : 45] This story is about the sheer costliness of grace and the sheer costliness of human love. That's what it's about. You see, the author could have jumped straight from verse 9 to verse 14, verse 15, but he puts in this little episode.

I think there are two things that are said here. First of all, human love is magnificent. Human love at its best shows the selflessness of God's love.

It is a genuine picture of God's grace, selfless, giving everything, caring nothing for one's own comfort so that others can be protected and others can be loved.

Love is stronger than death, says the Song of Songs. The big issues of life and death. As I say, it's a powerful little scene.

It reminds me in some ways of the verse in Ecclesiastes, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all humanity, and the living will lay it to heart.

[21 : 53] As we see this woman in her passionate and ultimately futile attempt to save her sons and so on, then we see something of the unselfish love and grace of God.

And you'll notice, of course, how it works in the sense that David removes the bodies and buried them. And once again, these verses 12 to 14 are important in showing us the respect David has, even for the dead bodies.

There's no question, these are my enemies, these are people who stood against me. That's not the point. Human love is magnificent, but the second point is surely human love is not enough on its own.

Rispa could not save her sons. Undoubtedly, she would have if she could have. Undoubtedly, if she could have saved these boys, she would have given her own life.

And that's why death is so brutal, in its utter desolation, the result of the curse. There's a graveyard, an old graveyard on the east coast of Fife, on an old gravestone are written these words, O Adam, what have you done?

[23 : 16] sheer poignant misery of death, separation, and desolation. O Adam, what have you done? And when we read that well-known little phrase, Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus.

Weeping not, I believe, simply for Lazarus, but for the fact of human misery, of graveyards, of death, of the wrath of God, which has passed upon all, for all have sinned, for sin and death and the ghastly consequences, the wrath of God, which causes us to run to the grace of God, not that we love God, but that he loved us, and gave his son to be the propitiation, the sacrifice that stands between God's anger and ourselves, till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied, and all our sins were on him laid.

In this old story, we see how death is, love is stronger than death, even in the human sense, because Rizpa's love has not been destroyed by death, and yet, it is only the covenant love of the Lord Jesus Christ that can finally destroy and defeat death.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. So God's grace heals the past. God's grace is illustrated in the costliness of human love.

And finally, in verses 15 to 22, God's grace preserves God's king. Now, it's important to realize that these chapters are not just a collection of incidents.

[25 : 00] There's no padding in scripture, there's no cobbling together of ideas, so, oh, I forgot about Ishbi Benob, so he better get his moment in the sun. That's not what the author of Samuel was saying.

They are linked with the previous verses by the costly grace of the covenant. It reminds us that who God's king is, and that God's kingdom cannot be prevented from coming.

Now, the time is not specified. There's one little detail at the end of verse 15. David grew weary.

That may suggest that David was older by this time, not the youth who had conquered Goliath.

There's a little problem. Look at verse 19. Elhenan, the son of Yari, Oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath, the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

We all thought David killed Goliath, didn't we? Yes, there's all this about. I don't want to spend too long on it, but just let me suggest two possible solutions. In Chronicles, in the Chronicles passage, which is parallel to this, we are told that Elhenan killed the brother of Goliath, the Gittite.

[26 : 17] It may simply be the words the brother has dropped out of the text. On the other hand, Elhenan may in fact be David's own name, and David may be his throne name.

It still happens. After all, Joseph Ratzinger is better known as Pope Benedict. Kings did take throne names and so on. Don't worry about it too much. The point is that this battle continues.

There was again war. The weary, there was war again. Verse 18, after this, there was again war. The battle continues.

The kingdom is coming, but the battle continues. We need to put on the whole armor of God and resist the vials of the devil. Notice two things here. First of all, God protects his king.

verse the lamp of Israel. Verse 17, David's men swore to him, we shall no longer go out with us to battle lest you quench the lamp of Israel.

[27 : 19] This does probably suggest later in David's reign, after his active service in the field. But anyway, if David goes, darkness falls. If the anointed king goes, then there will be death.

And this of course is the whole story of scripture, isn't it? Particularly the whole story of the Old Testament. The covenant line is continually under threat.

Under threat from the weakness of its representatives and the malevolence of its enemies. Think, for example, of Exodus chapter 1, when the Pharaoh decided to exterminate all the boys who were born in Israelite families, and therefore destroy the covenant people, and therefore make it impossible for the covenant king to come.

Of course, the whole book of Esther, the book of Esther where God's name is never mentioned, yet his guiding, protecting providence is behind every part of the book.

Then, of course, in Matthew chapter 2, go and kill all the boys in Bethlehem. Over and over and over again, God's king, is being attacked. Covenant line is under threat.

[28 : 33] This phrase, the lamp of Israel, occurs several times in one and two kings. The king is the light of his people, pointing, of course, to the one who is the light of the world.

That's the first thing. But the second thing is God silences his enemies. Look, first of all, verse 16, this gigantic lout, like the side of a house.

This should be Benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed 300 shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. This is the kind of brute force, which has often faced God's king and God's kingdom.

men. And then these other giants, the war at Gath, a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot.

The important phrase is, who was descended from the giants? And that's taking us back once again to the very beginning of our Bibles. Go back to Genesis 6 and the attempt to demonize humanity, the mighty men who were around just before the time of the flood, Satan attempting to demonize humanity so that the whole of the bloodline would be polluted.

[30 : 02] He almost succeeded, didn't he? Noah was pure in his bloodline. Only Noah carried this seed on into the new world and on into the kingdom.

the attempt to demonize humanity. Then in chapter 10, Nimrod, the mighty hunter, the warlord, who set up those great cities, Babylon, Nineveh, and so on, which throughout the Old Testament are to be hostile to the people of God.

And indeed, at the very end of the Bible, Babylon the Great, the embodiment of all the hostility to God, the serpent trying to destroy the descendant of the woman.

Now, all God's enemies will be silenced. Think of the great regimes that have come and gone.

Think of the godless and powerful and tyrannical regimes that have come and gone throughout the earth and still exist.

Now, when you look particularly, however, at verse 20, verse 21, when this guy with six fingers and so on taunted Israel, the trouble with this guy wasn't he was all fingers and toes, it was that he was all mouth.

[31 : 17] He taunted Israel. What does that remind us of? Back in 1 Samuel 17, Goliath taunted, Goliath derided, Goliath mocked.

And if you remember in the book of Revelation, when the devil works on the world, he, chapter 13, he summons two beasts who embody his power in the world. One is the beast that rises from the sea, the persecuting power of the state, represented here by the Philistine giant.

But he also summons another beast who speaks like the dragon. He looks like a lamb. In other words, he looks harmless.

He speaks with his master's voice. The beast of propaganda. And this is what's happening here as well. God's enemies will be silenced.

