

Fools for Christ

Today In Your Reading...

King David tried a second time to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The first attempt failed when Uzzah, one of the men helping to transport the Ark, accidentally touched it. As a result, Uzzah died, which ruined the King's party. However, David rebounded well, and after three months of praying and planning, the King tried again, this time according to all of the ceremonial laws that God had given to Moses. Consequently, God was pleased, the people were pleased, and King David was pleased. All went well, and the Ark was relocated from the house of Obed-edom to a tent that David had prepared in Jerusalem.

Next, David began making plans to build the Lord a splendid Temple, which would become the center of Jewish worship; but, that's for another day. It is interesting to me, in the account we read today, how everyone responded to moving the Ark. "David and all Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with much shouting and blowing of trumpets [and many other instruments]; and, David danced before the Lord with all his might..." (2 Samuel 6:14, 15).

"But as the Ark of the Lord entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she was filled with contempt for him... When David returned home, Michal came out to meet him and said in disgust, 'How glorious the king of Israel looked today! He exposed himself to the servant girls like any indecent person might do!'

"But David retorted, 'I was dancing before the Lord... and I am willing to act like a fool in order to show my joy to the Lord. Yes, I am willing to look even more foolish than this...' " (6:16, 20-22).

In essence, we have another example of the heart of David contrasted with the heart of Saul, or in this case, his daughter. **David didn't care what he said, what he did, or what he looked like to other people, as long as he was honoring to God.** He would be a fool for the Lord's sake!

Daily Reflection

What are some reasons why the world sees Christians as foolish?

As a Christ-follower, have you been tempted to hide your identity because of how others might react or what they might say? If so, what message does that communicate to the Lord?

If what you have in Christ is real, then it will be revealed in your life. You will not be able to hide it, nor will you want to. Instead, His joy, His love, and His peace will radiate in your face, your attitude, your actions, and your words; and, **you will care more about pleasing God than pleasing people.** Are you willing to look like "a fool" for the Lord in the eyes of the world? David was. "We are fools for Christ's sake..." (1 Corinthians 4:10).

Honor for Honor

April 24 — 2 Samuel 7:1-8:14; Psalm 60

Today In Your Reading...

David made plans to build a Temple for the Lord. Remember, in yesterday's reading, that he had the Ark of the Covenant moved to Jerusalem. He felt guilty for living in a luxurious house, when the Lord dwelled in a tent.

After he expressed his desires to the prophet Nathan, Nathan communicated God's response. He said, "I have never lived in a temple, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until now. My home has always been a tent, moving from one place to another; and, I have never once complained to Israel's leaders... I have never asked them, 'Why haven't you built me a beautiful cedar temple'" (2 Samuel 7:6, 7). In essence, God was saying that, while David's desire was noble and his plans pleased the Lord, it was unnecessary to build a temple for Him. He was content just to be among His people, the people of the covenant.

However, the Lord continued His message to David saying, "I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all of your enemies. Now, I will make your name famous throughout the earth!" He went on, "The Lord also declares to you that He will build a house for you — a dynasty of kings! For when you die, I will raise up one of your descendants and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house — a temple — for My name; and, I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Your dynasty and kingdom will continue for all time before Me..." (2 Samuel 7:9, 12, 13).

Of course, this covenant is referring to the reign of the Messiah to come, Jesus Christ. It was prophesied of Him that "the government would rest on His shoulders and of His kingdom there would be no end..." (Isaiah 9:6, 7). Then, when Jesus was born, it was said that "He would reign on the throne of David and over the house of

Jacob forever" (Luke 1:32, 33). What a wonderful promise that God was faithful to keep.

Daily Reflection

What I love about God's response to David is that **He is not so much honored by what we do for Him, like building a Temple, but that we desire to honor Him**. I also love the fact that God says, in essence, "Because you desire to honor Me, David, I will honor you." Several times after this intimate time with God, the Scriptures tell us that "the Lord helped David wherever he went."

It is true, **when you honor God, God will honor you**. He is not impressed with what you can do or are doing for Him (how can He be impressed), but rather God is honored by your desire to glorify Him. Do you desire to honor the Lord? Are you "building a house" for Him, a place where God is glorified — in your home, in your heart? How are you honoring the Lord?

Did you notice how David responded to God's blessings? "Who am I," he said, "that you have brought me this far? What can I say, for you know what I am really like" (7:18-20). **David did not respond in arrogance or boastfulness but in humility**. How have you responded to God's blessings in your life? It is humility that honors God, seeing yourself in light of His greatness; and, to the extent that you honor Him, may He honor you. "...For those who honor Me, I will honor; but those who despise Me will not be esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30).

A King's Kindness

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April 25 — 2 Samuel 8:15-10:19; 1 Chronicles 19:1-19

Day 115 — 250 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

David honored his covenant with his good friend Jonathan by showing kindness to his son Mephibosheth. Here is another type of Christ, a beautiful portrayal of what God has done for us. The Lord, who is pictured on the throne as mighty David, has all power and privilege, yet He is moved to compassion for His subjects. Like David, He is able to reign down judgment on the evil inhabitants of His kingdom, but He is more desiring to extend His love and kindness.

In this story, Saul represents mankind, once God's anointed, yet fallen from favor. Man, though once at peace with God, has fallen from heaven's graces. Then, there is Jonathan; although he is a son of that fallen family, he portrays the life of the sinless Son of Man, Jesus Himself, who had forged a covenant with King David. Likewise, Jesus forged a new covenant with God by His death on the cross.

Next, there is the lonely Mephibosheth, who is a picture of you and me, crippled in our sin and unable spiritually to help ourselves. Finally, there is Ziba, the servant of the King, who brings Mephibosheth to David and, then, ministers to him in his condition. Does not the Spirit of God draw men unto the saving presence of God and, then, empower them in their sinfulness to live the life of Christ?

The picture is clear — **God has shown us His compassion and kindness.** As David, who did not have to act for Mephibosheth's sake, was prompted to act out of His love for Jonathan, so does our Heavenly Father act, not on any merits that we have ourselves but upon His love for His own Son. It is true, God has demonstrated much love for us in that "while we were still sinners, He sent Christ to die for us" (*Romans 5:8*).

Daily Reflection

How can we, who have been given so much, so freely, hold back from doing the same with others? How can we, who have been extended the gracious and giving hand of God, hold out a hand of scorn or point fingers of judgment? *Would we not be hypocrites if we did not express the same kindness as we have received?*

Jesus had something to say about this, when He told the story of the slave who owed His Master a great deal of money. The Master passed judgment and arrested him and his family. However, He then forgave the debt and released the slave. Once he found himself free, the slave found people who owed him money and treated them harshly until they could repay him.

Upon hearing of the slave's hypocritical ways, the Master called him in and questioned him. "How can you treat your servants this way," the Master asked him, "after I have shown you so much kindness? How can you not forgive their debt to you? Didn't I forgive your debt to Me?" The slave had no answer; he was put in shackles and handed over to the torturers.

Consider your ways. Would you consider yourself to be a kind person? Why or why not?

Have you treated others as God has treated you? Are you putting others in "shackles" when God has freed you from your own? Don't play the hypocrite, but rather demonstrate God's love and kindness by loving others in the same way. **Set them free with your kindness.**

Just One Step

Today In Your Reading...

David ruined his life! He had an affair with another man's wife, got her pregnant, tried to cover it up, and, ultimately, had to commit murder to do so. In the process of destroying his own life, he also destroyed the lives of three other people: Uriah the Hittite, whom David killed covertly, Bathsheba, whom he seduced, impregnated, and widowed, and the baby, who was conceived as a result and whose life was taken by disease just seven days after his birth.

Of course, David repented (*Psalm 51*) and asked God for forgiveness (although beg was more like it); and, of course, **God released him from the guilt and shame of the whole ordeal, but He did not release him from its punishment.** Although the child died, that was not the end. "From this time on," the Lord said, "the sword will be a constant threat to your family... I will cause your own household to rebel against you (*2 Samuel 12:10, 11*). The guilt of these deadly deeds did pass, but the pangs of their penalties would haunt David forever.

Over the years, I have heard many applications of this account in David's life, and all of them would be worth the time it would take to share them; but I must digress and cut to the quick. If this period in David's life teaches us anything, it should be two things: first, **none of us, even the "best" of us, are without sin**; even King David was not perfect. Second, **at any time, any one of us can take a step off of "the path" and stumble or fall** in a way that topples all that we have done or said in our lifetime. For these reasons, it is vital to guard ourselves against the pitfalls that surround us.

Perhaps you have heard this before, that we are most prone to stumble when we are alone, when we are tired, when we are hungry, when we are under pressure, or when we are spiritually weak.

Satan knows our weak spots, and we should know them too. But it's not enough to know our weak spots, **we must set up barriers around them, so that we stay far away from taking the wrong step.** God's grace is sufficient to cover any and all of our mistakes, but let us be diligent to keep our steps on the right path.

Daily Reflection

Peter wrote, "Be on the lookout, for the Devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" (*1 Peter 5:7*). Are you on the lookout? How are you protecting yourself from stepping off of the path and getting devoured?

You will sin; it is only a matter of time. But, did you catch how David was restored? He recognized the hideousness of his sin, he blamed no one but himself, and he pleaded for divine restoration. David also understood that because he was innately sinful, he was unable to purify himself, to achieve right standing before God in his own power. He knew that only the Lord could "create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit within" (*Psalm 51*).

You are to be on the lookout, to guard yourself against temptation, but *when you sin, that is not the end.* **Your gracious God has made a way for you to be forgiven and restored through Jesus Christ.** "If you confess your sins, God is faithful to forgive you and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness" (*1 John 1:9*). **Praise Him for making you whole, especially when you fall to pieces.**

Pursue Peace

April 27 — 2 Samuel 12:26-14:33

Day 117 — 248 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Joab and the army ended their siege of the Ammonite capital of Rabbah; but, instead of capturing the city himself, Joab sent a message to David, "Bring the rest of the army with you and finish the job, so that you will get credit for the victory instead of me" (12:28). Joab's unselfishness is impressive. Most generals are all about guts and glory, self-aggrandizement, but Joab wanted to honor his king instead of himself.

Unfortunately, though things were going well on the battlefield, David's family experienced some dysfunctionality back home. David's son Amnon forced himself on his sister Tamar, which, of course, disgraced her and dishonored the family. David's first son, Absalom, took revenge into his own hands and arranged to have Amnon killed. Absalom fled to Geshur for three years, until David finally called him to return to Jerusalem. Although the two were reconciled, the story is not over. We will read more tomorrow.

Once again, it was David's general, Joab, who realized how much the king was missing his son and who arranged for them to get back together. While he was a great leader and a fierce warrior, Joab demonstrated tremendous character, such as courage, humility, loyalty, kindness, and compassion. He was not oblivious to other's needs, but, instead, recognized that David was hurting and took the initiative to help him.

Daily Reflection

We were also introduced to a strange woman from Tekoa who "had a reputation for wisdom." Joab used her to appeal to David, instead of going to him directly. In her charade, she made a few comments that I thought were noteworthy. "All of us must die eventually. Our lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. That is why God tries to bring us back when we have been separated

from Him. He does not sweep away the lives of those He cares about, and neither should you" (14:14). While this woman was not speaking on God's behalf, but from her own wisdom, she said some things worth thinking about.

First, unless Jesus returns, *you will die*. Like a spilled drink, it cannot be put back into the cup. Though you will have eternal life in heaven, on earth physical death is irreversible. What that means is, in the grand scheme of things, **your time here is short**, so short, in fact, that **it is a waste of your days to be tangled up in conflict with others**, separated from them because of anger, bitterness, grudges, or hurt feelings. It is far better to spend your days reconciled to others, especially the ones you love.

As of today, are you reconciled with all people or is there someone from whom you are separated? Have you pursued reconciliation?

If there is someone with whom you need to be reconciled, what is keeping you from doing so?

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18).

The Pain of Punishment

April 28 — 2 Samuel 15:1-17:14

Today In Your Reading...

After all that David had done to reconcile his son Absalom, who murdered Amnon for sexually abusing Tamar, Absalom conspired to take his father's place on the throne. Over the course of a few years, Absalom turned the hearts of the people against David, raised an army, and returned to Jerusalem to take the city by force. Rather than fight and risk the destruction of the city and the death of his loved ones, David chose, instead, to abandon Jerusalem.

David on the run sounds familiar doesn't it? If anyone knew how to escape into hiding, it was David. He had evaded King Saul in the desert for years, trusting in the Lord for his protection; now, here he was again trusting in God to save him from his son, who was threatening to take his throne. However, when David hid in the desert the first time, it was for reasons outside of his control; **this time, he was having to hide for reasons of his own doing.**

Absalom's conspiracy to take the throne from his father was a consequence of David's sin with Bathsheba. It was also a fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy, when God said, "Because of what you have done, I, the Lord, will cause your own household to rebel against you" (12:11). The betrayal of Absalom was part of David's punishment for adultery, deception, and murder. Isn't it interesting, then, that David ascended the Mount of Olives, weeping over his sins, when Jesus, a descendant of David, will ascend the same mountain the night that He was arrested, when He began to carry the weight of and be punished for the sins of all men?

Because David understood that this displacement was a consequence of his sins, he endured it patiently and with humility. As Shimei, a member of Saul's family, followed him, cursed him, and threw rocks at him, which is itself a

picture of Satan our accuser, David had to suffer the reminders of his failures. Although as King, he had the power to kill Shimei, he chose not to respond to his accusations; sounds again like Christ, who although he was reviled did not respond to His accusers. Furthermore, the long line of people that David had inconvenienced — wives, children, advisers, guards, friends, and other family members — reminded him too of his mistakes. **His sins had affected many.** However, he knew in time that God would restore him and everything would be alright. For now, **he had to endure the pain of his punishment.**

Daily Reflection

Can you remember a time when you had to endure the punishment for a sin that you committed? What do you remember? What was the most painful part of the process?

God is good to forgive our sins and to restore our relationship with Him, but that does not mean that He releases us from the consequences of our sins. Why not? Why does He allow us to endure such pain and punishment?

A Friend in Need

April 29 — 2 Samuel 17:15-19-30

Day 119 — 246 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

David, his family, and his army escaped across the Jordan River from the dangers of Absalom's rebellion. Though he had pressed David to the very end of his kingdom, Absalom was not satisfied until he had killed him. He would never truly be the rightful king while David was still alive.

Thus, we had a showdown between the two armies in the forest of Ephraim, a forest so dangerous that "more men died because of it than were killed by the sword" (18:8). Even Absalom himself was caught by the forest when his long hair was snatched by the low-hanging branches of a great oak, which lifted him off of his mule. When Joab found him dangling there, he and his men promptly ended his life. Thus, the very symbol of Absalom's pride, his beautiful hair (14:25, 26), led to his ultimate downfall.

Once Absalom was gone and the threat to David's kingdom averted, the King arranged to return to Jerusalem. Once they arrived back at the Jordan River, David, his family, and his army were welcomed and celebrated all the way to the holy city. God had been merciful, and Israel's true King had been restored.

In the midst of this terrible ordeal, I was impressed with those men and women who came forward to help the King in his distress. **Is it not when we experience hardship and turmoil that we discover who our true friends are?**

In such a time of tribulation, it is quickly discovered where people's loyalties lie; and, David found out that he was blessed to have such a fantastic network of loyal friends.

Abiathar and Zadok, the priests, remained loyal to David; and, Hushai, David's trusted advisor returned to Jerusalem to spy on Absalom and thwart his plans. Ittai, the captain of the Gittite army, a guest in Israel, a foreigner in exile,

vowed to stay with David and defend his cause. Then, when David arrived in Mahanaim, he was greeted warmly by Shobi, Makir, and Barzillai, who demonstrated great hospitality in taking care of the royal family. Of course, who can forget Joab, who, when David needed it most, demonstrated tough love and spoke sternly to his king after his men saved him and his family from Absalom's threat?

Daily Reflection

Friends are truly a gift from God, to encourage you when you are in distress, to comfort you when you experience loss, and to speak truth to you when you need it most.

Which of your friends has proven to be a comfort or an encouragement during times of turmoil? What exactly have they done?

Which of your friends loves you enough to speak truth into your life when you need it most?

Are you a friend like this to others? Can you be counted on to comfort or are you too quick to criticize? Are you bold enough to speak truth to your friends or do you tend to flatter? **Just as you appreciate faithful friends, so do others, especially in times of need.**