

Science tells us that light consists of three rays, or three groups of wavelengths, each ray distinct from one other, no one of which without the others would be light. Each ray has its own separate function. The first light ray *originates*, the second light ray *illuminates*, and the third light ray *consummates*. The first light ray, the one that originates, can neither be seen nor felt. This ray is often called invisible light. The second light ray, the one which illuminates, can be both seen and felt. This is the light ray we both see and feel when the sun hits our skin. The third ray, the one which consummates, cannot be seen but can be felt. We know this ray for its extreme heat that it gives off. It has been said that some people change their ways when they see the light, and for others, not so much so until they feel the heat. Jesus came as the light who illuminates God so that we might experience both light and heat. The Word of God tells us that our Lord came as a light into a dark world that we might both see the glory of God and feel the heat of God’s presence. John 1:1-5 says that: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

As we enter our text for this morning, we do so in the darkness of the ongoing consequences of King David’s sin that began in 2 Samuel 11 when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband Uriah murdered. As a result, the child conceived by David and Bathsheba became ill and died. And last week we saw that the darkness of the consequences of his sin grew longer and wider as David’s son Amnon raped his sister Tamar; and David’s son Absalom murdered Amnon; and Absalom conspired to remove his father King David from the throne; and David fled for his life from Jerusalem and he became entangled with Saul’s family again; and Absalom entered Jerusalem and claimed the throne; and Absalom’s advisors devised a plan to kill King David; but David’s friend hears of the plan and he warns King David; and David and his mighty men were able to defeat the plan to kill David; and David’s son Absalom is killed in battle and King David grieves the death of his son – which is a dark consequence of David’s sin with Bathsheba. In these verses of these texts we learned that God allows us to feel the consequences and effects of sin so we know that He is our strength and our Savior.

We see that same dark shadow of the ongoing consequences of King David’s sin still at work in the immediate context of our text for today - as 2 Samuel 21 opens by telling us that after David had resumed his reign as King over Israel, the nation suffered a three-year famine. And we read that David inquired of the Lord regarding the reason for the famine, and God told him that the famine was due to Saul’s slaughter of the Gibeonites who were a remnant of the Amorites. The Gibeonites should have been annihilated by the Israelites, but they were deceived and foolishly entered into a covenant promise with them that guaranteed their safety. Apparently, Saul sought to cast this covenant promise aside by killing some of the Gibeonites. The solution to this injustice required the death of seven of Saul’s descendants. And so seven were put to death and their bones, along with the bones of Saul and Jonathan, were buried together in a grave – *another* consequence of David’s sin. And then the famine ends. In the rest of 2 Samuel 21 we read of King David’s final battles. His physical strength weakened and others stepped forward to fill the gap. Years before David had fought his Goliath, and now it became the task of some of David’s most faithful men to carry on in David’s place. King David acknowledges these mighty men of war and what they had done in the closing words of the chapter.

As we enter 2 Samuel 22, we enter the conclusion to the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. This conclusion, which continues through 2 Samuel 24, will bring home the points the author of these books has been trying to make throughout all the 55 chapters we’ve gone through. But this epilogue will also make a stunningly deep, joyous, hope-filled, glorious statement, regarding what it means to be man or woman who seeks to have a heart after God to do all of God’s will, *but* who also is prone to wander from the light of God and fall into sin and live in the dark shadow of the ongoing consequences and effects of previous sins.

The spiritual core of these concluding chapters is made up of two psalms written by David, the first is 2 Samuel 22:1-51 which looks back on his deliverance from Saul and his enemies and ahead to his reign as king, the second is 2 Samuel 23:1-7 which looks back on King David's reign over Israel as the time of his departure from the world drew near. The theme of both of these psalms is, "God is my salvation." In spite of grave dangers and overwhelming odds against him, God delivered David from death and fulfilled His promise that he would become Israel's king. Beyond this, David sees God as his future deliverer, when He sends the great king, Messiah, to accomplish his full and final glorious salvation.

*And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said,
The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence.
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.
For the waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me;
the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me.
In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I called.
From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears. 2 Samuel 22:1-7*

*He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters.
He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.
They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support.
He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me. 2 Samuel 22:17-20*

*With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;
with the purified you deal purely, and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.
You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down.
For you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness.
For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.
This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.
For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?
This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless.
He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.
He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your gentleness made me great. 2 Samuel 22:26-36*

*The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation,
the God who gave me vengeance and brought down peoples under me,
who brought me out from my enemies; you exalted me above those who rose against me;
you delivered me from men of violence.
For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.
Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his offspring forever. 2 Samuel 22:47-51*

This psalm of David's "God is my salvation" is also recorded as Psalm 18. It is most likely repeated because its message is pertinent to all of us. As King David looked back on his life, he clearly saw that all of his successes, achievements and victories were ultimately God's doing. As David reflects on his rise to the throne, he understands that his rise to power and prominence is due to divine grace. He recalls the danger he was in and the death that seemed inevitable, and he praises God as his rescuer, his refuge, his source of strength. David also affirms that through him a greater one will come: "Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever."

Now these are the last words of David:

*The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high,
the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel:*

“The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue.

The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me:

*When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light,
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.*

For does not my house stand so with God?

For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.

For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?

*But worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away, for they cannot be taken with the hand;
but the man who touches them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear,
and they are utterly consumed with fire.”* 2 Samuel 23:1-7

These first seven verses of chapter 23 are some of David’s final words. He writes of the privilege of being the Lord’s anointed king – and he speaks of the beauty of reigning both with righteousness and in the fear of God. King David also declares that the only reason his reign has been successful is because of the promise of God’s covenant with David. In contrast, he also speaks of those who resist and reject God and God’s people. They will face an entirely different fate in that they will experience the judgment of God. In the remainder of chapter 23 (verses 8-39) we are reminded that David’s successes as king and victories as warrior were a team effort. While in 2 Samuel 22, we were reminded that it is really God who is Israel’s king, and it is He who wins their battles – now, in 2 Samuel 23, the mighty warriors who fought for David and the nation of Israel are listed as a part of the reason why David was so successful in battle. In verse 39, numbered the very last among these mighty men of war, is Bathsheba’s husband Uriah the Hittite, the faithful soldier whose life David took in an attempt to cover up his sin. And then, in the very next verses, the opening verses of 2 Samuel 24, we read:

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” So the king said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, “Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people, that I may know the number of the people.” But Joab said to the king, “May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?” But the king’s word prevailed against Joab and the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to number the people of Israel. 2 Sam 24:1-4

After writing two heartfelt glorious psalms praising God for being the God of grace and mercy and love and goodness; proclaiming God to be the ultimate source of provision and protection and power and strength and hope and refuge and forgiveness and cleansing and redemption and restoration and salvation; King David decides to count his armed forces. This is an affront to God, because 1) it implies that David is counting on his army for protection, rather than the living God, and 2) it implies David’s pride in the hundreds of thousands of forces at his command. Regardless of what we might think of Joab at this point, we read that he knew that numbering people for military purposes was the wrong before God. Deep down, David knew that too; he wrote Psalm 20:7 says: *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”* And so if he knew and Joab told him not to do it, why did David demand a counting of his troops? Well our text tells us that God *“incited”* David to do so. But when we look at parallel passage about this story, 1 Chronicles 21:1 tells us that *“satan . . . incited”* David to sin. Well, these are not contradictory statements, but rather two different views of the same event. First, we know that David was sinfully wrong in what he asked people to do and he would personally be accountable for his action. Secondly we also know that when we make a decision to sin, the evil one is always inclined to “fan the flames,” of our desires to do it. And thirdly, we also know that God is sovereignly in control of everything - which means in the end, God is always responsible.

But that doesn't take us off the hook. We are all still personally accountable to God for what we do, regardless of who we might want to blame - because *God has his greater purposes for us in what he makes happen or allows to happen to us in this life.* In Isaiah 55:8-9 God declares: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* We see that truth in terms of human sin in the story of Joseph. In their sinful pride and jealousy, his brothers sold him off into slavery and told his father he was dead. And after years of suffering the painful consequences of his brother's sin Joseph was elevated to the second highest position in Egypt, which allowed Joseph to ultimately rescue his family, brothers and all, from certain death. In Genesis 50:20 Joseph told his brothers: *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."* The Word of God and life itself reveals the truth of God that even though human sin is evil and has painful effects and consequences, *God can cause what is meant for evil to be used for good.*

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." And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.'" So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, *"Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me."* 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."*

So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. 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. 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."

And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." So David went up at Gad's word, as the Lord commanded. And when Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming on toward him. And Araunah went out and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground. And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be averted from the people." Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God accept you." But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

2 Samuel 24-10-25

In these verses we read that in midst of the dark shadows of the ongoing consequences of King David's sin with Bathsheba, David repents of his sin of pridefully trusting in his army rather than God – which causes even more dark shadows of consequences - in that God punishes David's pride by sending a plague on Israel. The disease cuts down a large part of the population and threatens Jerusalem. David is then guided to buy a particular threshing floor which belongs to Araunah, one of the conquered Jebusites. Here he builds an altar and offers sacrifices to halt the plague, and the plague stops. Araunah's threshing-floor is high up overlooking the Kidron Valley. By the providential purposes of our most sovereign God the site of the threshing-floor would become the site of Solomon's temple.

Last week God's Word revealed to us that God allows us to feel the consequences and effects of sin so we know that He is our strength and Savior. Our text from God's Word today, and from all the 55 chapters of 1 & 2 Samuel, reveal to us that - even though human sin is evil, and it has painful effects and fatal consequences – *human sin can never hinder nor stop our most sovereign God from accomplishing His plans and His purposes*. While God does work through us, He does his best work *in spite of us*. When we read the whole story of David's life after his sin, we become painfully aware of just how costly his sin was. David did repent of his sins, and God did forgive them, but the long consequences of his sins were stunningly and fatally immense. David's son died. David's daughter was raped by one of his sons. Another son seeks to take the throne from David. Also, all too many Israelites died. But while the first child born to David and Bathsheba died, their son Solomon was loved of God and chosen to be the next king of Israel. David's sin of numbering the Israelites cost many their lives, but it resulted in the purchase of the place where the great temple of God would be built. God is sovereignly able to take our sins, without causing or justifying them, and turn them into instruments of His grace for blessing.

This is what we see on the cross. In the darkness of the shadow of the consequences of the human sin of rejecting God in the garden of Eden cast across the history of mankind - God promised to send a Savior into the world to pay the penalty for our sins, which is death. And God fulfilled His promise by sending Jesus into the world to sacrificially take our place on the cross - so that by a single act of violent grace of being nailed to and dying on a cross, Jesus offers us forgiveness of sin and redemption of our souls and healing of our hearts and restoration of our relationship with God – which will give us a new life today and an eternal life forever – when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

In following the life of David over these past week we have seen the faithfulness of God to fulfill His promise to send His people a Savior. 1 Samuel began with the plight of Hannah, who was unable to bear children. God “saved” her from barrenness and gave her not only Samuel, but other children as well – and Samuel would be the one God would call to anoint both Saul, and David who would save Israel as they led the nation in battle against their enemies, especially the Philistines. God served as David's Savior time and again during his life, and David came to look to a “son of David” to save him in the end. The books of Samuel have much to say to us about the faithfulness of God as the Savior of His people, even when His people fail. We praise God that when we do fail, it does not thwart the work of God.

King David was known “as a man after God's own heart” to do all of God's will – yet we've clearly seen that David did not do “*all*” of God's will *perfectly*, just like we all do not do “*all*” of God's will *imperfectly* - because we are all fallen human beings. But what made David “*a man after God's own heart*” was that he looked beyond his sin, beyond his failure, beyond the darkness of the consequences of what had done – and put his faith in the promise of God that God would save him. This is what we will celebrate this coming week, and especially so next Sunday. In the midst of the fallen human failure to love and live for the one who created us, Jesus sacrificed his life and rose from the dead so that we might live with Him forever. This is the good news of the gospel that the world needs desperately. This past week a terrorist killed four people and wounding 15 others in Stockholm; ISIS executed 33 young adults in Syria and ISIS suicide bombers killed 22 people in Iraq. The Syrian Army dropped nerve gas bombs on the civilian population in the rebel-held part of northern Syria that left over dead and hundreds sickened, many of them being children. And this morning ISIS killed three dozen people in two churches in Egypt. King David wrote: “*For you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness*” (2 Samuel 22:29) Human sin can never hinder nor stop our most sovereign God from accomplishing His plans and His purposes. What this means to us is that regardless of what has happened or is happening or will happen – God has a greater plan and purpose. Jesus is the light the originates, illuminates and consummates. He came to bring a light into a dark world that we might both see the glory of God and feel the heat of God's presence. Regardless of what we've done, are doing or will do – God is at work, fulfilling His promise to save us from sin, evil and the world. Amen? Amen!