

Deadly Pride

The Life of David

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Well, this evening we pursue as we have been now for a fair few months here in our evening services, the life of David and we've been just doing particular selected excerpts, if you like, because we could be here for many many months if we looked at every chapter of the narrative that there is, fascinating though that narrative is in all the detail, the twists and turns, but we've contented ourselves with just dwelling upon some of the major themes of David's life, major experiences, and we are beginning to reach towards the end of this series. After all, he's coming to be the king, extraordinary providences in the way that God was with his servant, this man after God's own heart, but then we've encountered some of the sadder aspects of David's life, there's decline from faith when in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite. He failed miserably and there we saw David at his worst. And though we've come through that and we've stopped with Absalom awhile and seen how in this, that sin has its consequences of how in this moral universe God tailors consequences to people that match, in a way, their own sin and that they are then receiving, inheriting something of what it is they've already sown, and that we saw with David in the way in which he was deceived, and the way in which he saw murder within his own family, was also within his own family circle, seeing adultery committed as though all of the things that he, himself, had been involved in regarding Bathsheba and her husband whom he had murdered, Uriah the Hittite. That came home to roost with him.

Well, we're still with something of the heavier aspect of learning from David's life, learning by his mistakes. Lord willing, the last two in this series will finish on a sort of higher note there, but this evening we are in 2 Samuel 24, this rather intriguing incidence of this census that was taken. The heading is this, "Deadly Pride." Deadly pride. As we'll come to see in a moment, this is what commentators really think was behind David's sin and behind the way in which God allowed that sin to wax strong and then judged it.

So God's displeasure being expressed. By now Nathan no longer there in the king's court. Gad is the appointed representative of God who brings to David's attention when David realizes what he's done and smitten in conscience realizes that he's sinned against God. It took nine months to get there as we read, nine months to the day, but he got there and then God brought before him the choices that he was to face, those choices, all of them have impact upon the nation, that people were going to suffer as a result. David himself

would suffer as their king. And so he opts there to fall, as it were, into the Lord's hands recognizing that there is mercy and he's correct, isn't he, because the Lord relents. When the angel has gone through the land and it's now Jerusalem that is about to be stricken during those three days of judgment that the Lord brought that plague upon Israel with, but the Lord relented. David was right to place himself in God's hands, to recognize that God might relent, that God might see the repentance of the king who had brought this horror upon his nation and pity them and forgive them.

No, it had been actually, we haven't time really in this series here to dwell upon 2 Samuel 21. Again there's another curious incident, the punishment that God required of some of the descendants of Saul because of the treatment of the Gibeonites which Saul had unleashed upon the Gibeonite people. If one were to go back to Joshua 9 when poised to capture the Promised Land and the Gibeonites realizing that their occupancy of the land, their days are numbers, but they deceived Joshua into believing, making believe that they came actually from far far away and Joshua went on rather hurriedly and unadvisedly into a covenant with them. But having established that covenant that they would be safe with him and that they would be looked after, that Joshua would not raise his weapons against them, then they realized, well, actually they live just around the corner and the deception, well, has been played upon them but the covenant stands, and that covenant should have stood during the time of King Saul but we are to understand that it didn't and that Saul himself began to attack the Gibeonites and seize their lands, kill them, genocide, if you like, which that king in all of his murderous fury with the disintegration of his own moral and mental apparatus unleashed. But the results were unhappy and perhaps within the nation there was some glee or perhaps a thought of recompense on those Gibeonites for that deception that they had played many hundreds of years before on their form there on Joshua.

So they brought themselves into this rather too happily and so the displeasure of God was against the nation. Drought came and the inquiry that was made brought this disclosure that actually it was because of Saul's attack on the Gibeonites and, well, it's rather a gruesome requirement that the law required that the atonement was that some of Saul's descendants would have to die, that there, as it were, that was the law there, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in that regard, just reserve there some of Saul's descendants. So we see that wrongs that are committed historically, well, this isn't a subject that's much out of the news at this moment, is it there, but here in America and elsewhere but that actions taken by nations against other nations or peoples within nations have consequences. Those consequences the people might try to forget but God doesn't and sometimes there is later on there to be something of a reckoning, something of a righting of past wrongs.

So that did happen in 1 Samuel 21. A bit different now because this seems to be something of David's difficulty but perhaps also the nations. So the heading is this: ambushed by pride. Ambushed by pride. As I said, commentators seem to think that what is happening here and why God's anger is aroused against David and he allows and in Chronicles you read it's Satan actually who incites David to go and to have this census taken, the numbers of all the men within Israel, Jerusalem, everywhere to be counted. It

was pride, pride in David but also pride that was endemic in the nation, as though here was some rather ungodly, rather distasteful national trait of pride, distasteful pride. "Look at us. Look at who we are. Look at our numbers, how strong that we are."

So David, as it were, wanted confirmation of those numbers. He wanted every last head counted so he could look at those numbers and say, "Well, look at this. I'm king over this great company of people, all of these in Judah, all of the rest of the tribes of Israel." Of course, it worked rather differently and when he had those numbers and the total was there and we can read of that in verse 9 it tells us, "eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men." That's quite a company of people, isn't it there? But instead of David looking at that and smiling contentedly and thinking, "I'm king over this. These are my loyal men. We can fight any army with this." Instead we realize that this was pride that was at work and maybe the nation too had gone along with this, "Yes, let's hear those numbers. We are a nation, aren't we? There's King David maybe past his prime, maybe not now being able to go out and fight battles but his history is illustrious and the future stretches out before us. What could possibly go wrong?"

Well, David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. The act of seeing of those figures didn't bring him comfort but showed him, "Why did you want to do this, David? What have you been doing here?" Nine months this has been taking place and maybe his conscience was knocking away just as it was when he had committed against Bathsheba and Uriah and against all the people and against God, and yet somehow sat on his conscience and some of the Psalms speak about his unhappiness and the upheaval in his soul, perhaps something similar happening here, uneasy. But now it just comes out that he was ambushed by pride, that earlier in causing this census to take place, that his pride had surfaced, it had come through. Even this man, the maturity of his years, wisdom surely he had accumulated and he had, but it's still pride could come spring a surprise upon him, prompt his actions, lead him foolishly into this course that he was engaged upon and lead him eventually to bring judgment upon himself and upon his people. That's why we think perhaps the nation was a little bit swelled up, a little bit puffed up as well, and here they receive this judgment from above.

Curious that even Joab bristles at this because it is permissible in the law of God in the old covenant that a census could be taken of the nation with a view to taxation, taxes that would be levied on the people there really to support the priesthood and that kind of thing. That was a valid, that was a legitimate reason. This was not and Joab, though not a very spiritual man at all, a troublemaker really and a bit of a loose cannon, not following the law of God and doing his own thing and David hadn't checked him. But here he should have listened to Joab because Joab finds this distasteful, so do the captains of the army. They realize, "This isn't right," and yet David doesn't listen to them.

Still for all his experience and maturity, still being the man after God's own heart, still pride was there and could overpower him, could sway his judgment, could incite him in that way to follow this course of action and bring great harm to himself and to his nature. And we have to admit the fact that pride remains a core element of our continuing sinful

nature. As believers with a new nature, born again in the Spirit of God, new creatures that we are, wonderful all of that and yet still we carry with us something of the body of death of our old sinful nature. It doesn't evaporate away at conversion and it doesn't suddenly come under such subjection that we no longer are troubled by it but, no, rather we are continuing to be troubled by it and pride is a big part, big constituent element of the sinful nature and it can rear its ugly head and in older age when we've traveled perhaps long and far with the Lord, but still can ambush us as it did here with David and can sway our judgment and overpower our better reasoning, rob us of spiritual insight and thought, and prompt us in directions that are just not good and all the while justifying it, that somewhere within this, David's conscience might have been troubling him but he had reasons to answer back and might have dressed up what he was doing in spiritual language and all the worse really for that.

But it carries with it, doesn't it, this thought that we're important, in fact, we're the center of it all, that we are the people and we are too big to fail. We are too big to fail. We in the end become our own gods, that's what pride makes us think, we are our own gods. We might think that we're very much serving the true God but actually pride is robbing from the true God and is twisting his law a bit and make ourselves comfortable in here or validate something that we're thinking of doing there which isn't really God's will. But we kind of make it God's will because pride says that our will, in the end, really is the most important part of it.

So we disobey the law and even kind of justify ourselves in doing it, believing ourselves here, that's language of pride, that sort of conversation that still happens somewhere within us that we're special and indeed we can be above the law, we could even break the law and that that is all okay. Well, isn't it horrible and isn't it terrible in that David, this deeply deeply spiritual man, that he still has that narrative, that horrible conversation, that nagging of the sinful nature working within him and that he didn't resist it here at this key point. Dear friends, we can always say, yes, we've know this, we've all of us been overturned by pride, ambushed by it at various times and we feel the great shame of it. But why did it happen here? Why did it happen now? Was there some restraint that had been removed? And Nathan the prophet was no longer alive, I don't know. God is now coming onto the scene but perhaps David has yet to respect him to the level that he did Nathan and that restraint is gone, that remembrance. If he had seen Nathan, it reminded him of that most terrible episode, kept him in check. Nathan reprovved him for his sin in adultery and in murdering Uriah, but maybe he's no longer so visible, maybe he's an old man, maybe he's incapacitated, but he's not there maybe to be that reminder to David's conscience.

And perhaps though Absalom, his son, there is the warning, wasn't it? David must have wondered that pride in Absalom that was there, that horrible way in which he wanted to be the main man, he wanted to have all of the acclaim, he wanted to steal the hearts of people, even have his father put to death in order to accomplish that. But David must have read into that and looked at himself, if you will, in the mirror, "I wonder how much of that have I been part of?" But now maybe he thought the lesson is all learned. I learned, if he was in that mode of listening, "I learned all I need to learn from that. We've

moved on, firmly got it. Won't be shouldered again with that." There, of course, is again the deceitfulness of sin that we might have enjoyed, a considerable victory over a sin and then being complacent, thought, "Job done. I've seen that one off. That is no longer going to trouble me. That was a wonderful victory that was accomplished." It may well have been but yet that sin hasn't completely gone away. It might have endured quite a considerable defeat and quite a lot of its power taken from it but it's still there and we can be by complacency suddenly quite overcome by it when we're tired, when we're ill, when we're under some stress or other and there manifesting itself is that sin, and worse, we're actually succumbing to it.

So perhaps David had become complacent, perhaps he thought he'd learned all that he needed to learn about pride and that he was now comfortable, he was safe, he was out of reach of that, and then ended up in this situation that he did. He reminds us, doesn't he, of Nebuchadnezzar who some centuries later over Babylon, looking over the city, this rather proud emperor, huge territories that he possessed right down to Egypt extending eastward, why, he thought to himself looking on mighty Babylon which I have built and God judged him at that point and he was sent out to live there as man who had lost his mind, eating grass and such things as that. But there was Nebuchadnezzar, that same pride.

I know so much in the church circles that we move in what he used to be in this man but he wouldn't speak to anybody or kind of give them any time of day in terms of his advice and the time unless they had a certain number of twitter followers, right? I forget the number, what it was but you needed to have, well, I don't know, 50,000 or something twitter followers before he'd even bother looking at you, and that kind of thing. That's pride and that man eventually was outed really as being a bully and an arrogant man and not clean in his thinking and so he's no longer in our church circles.

But there is a situation that for us maybe in smaller ways. We haven't got great armies to do a census of and our church membership list there, we can't look at that and kind of think there the hundreds there, the thousands. No, we can't perhaps be feeling guilty on those scores but just in different ways in a host of smaller ways where just a bit of smugness, just a bit of superiority, a bit of complacency can creep in and giving ourselves too much time and attention, pampering, just getting a bit slack in our duties, a little bit more in our thinking kind of off-duty as people. Well, that can be pride working there.

We read, didn't we, 1 John 2, and as it warns there of the things that are the world, things in the world. They have an appeal because they're appealing to something in us and here is how John puts it in verse 16 of 1 John 2, "For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," well, he says that "is not of the Father," that doesn't come from God, "but is of the world," that is, the fallen world and its aspect in us, our fallen creature. Well, it's going to appeal and it appeals, amongst other things, there's the lust of the flesh just plain gross sin, the lust of the eyes, the imaginations that we might have, but then the pride of life, that we just feel as if we are in charge, where destiny there, that all we've done like Nebuchadnezzar, well, it's all of our doing. Pride of life and who we are, what we've accomplished, that's not of the Father.

So we must watch for it. We must be ever ever vigilant, always on guard, always surveying carefully what's happening within our soul, risings thereof or slackening off that there might be, abating of zeal perhaps there and excusing ourselves in particular behaviors and habits and all of that we should be ever vigilant of, listening to ourselves, taking temperature checks on our soul, watching when we react to things. Why did we act like that, we make inquiry. Words that we suddenly find ourselves saying is as if as though we turn around and look at ourselves and say, "What was that?" And then we're investigating, "Well, where did that come from?" And we investigate, don't we there, and we may well find that's pride. That was me being proud.

And we are before God, aren't we, and we're confessing it and we're looking to be purified within, that pride will get buried that bit deeper, that it won't have such an influence, that it won't get access to that part of me again, but aware that it may get access to other parts and we're on watch and we're careful and when we feel the beginnings of it, ah, we're there before God in prayer, we're looking for help from heaven and praying and acting in accordance with how we're praying to defeat it. How often we have to be ready to deny ourselves, ready to exercise self-control. Pride would disarm self-control and just go for gold and we have to resist it, get a handle on it, and we have to beware that it never will leave off, not until our last days upon earth. And as we get older, pride can actually manifest itself even worse then, that if we've reached the point where we have in the Christian pilgrimage, well, like Nebuchadnezzar we might look on that and so I think that we did this. This was our accomplishment here. Well, think none of that. It was God all the way.

And we mentioned some few sermons back Barzillai, this godly aged man who had been a great help to David, the fugitive with those who had gone with him to escape from Absalom, brought food and goodwill that meant so so much to David. But then when David returns to Jerusalem, Barzillai is there welcoming him back to the city and glad that the anointed of the Lord was once more resuming the throne and David invites him, "Well, come with me. Come and enjoy my favor in Jerusalem with me and enjoy the good things that there are there." And he refuses it for one of his relatives, his grandson we think it probably is, to go and to be that but he says, "No, I am an older man. I'd just be a burden here. It's not for me to enjoy these things, my senses are not as sharp as they used to be. Let me go back to my home, that's where I belong that I can prepare there for my own decline that finally will issue in death." He didn't think, "Oh, that's all right. I've earned that, you know. Jerusalem, you say, in the palace, you say, best foods. I think I deserve that. I think all I've done in my life, it adds up to this." Well, no, he was a humble man instead and refused that position, refused those honors and what a good example, in a way, that he is there. He wasn't ambushed by pride at that point, as thought that offer from David which was offered with all good intention didn't then suddenly turn his head and maybe he was overpowered. No, he wasn't and he maintained his dignity in that.

My second heading is this, it's very obvious, isn't it: pride brings ruin. Pride brings ruin. Moral universe and God will so arrange events that our pride will be our undoing. At some point or other if we manage "to get away with it here in this life," we won't get

away with it at the judgment throne. But often it is that those who are proud, well, they bring great trouble upon themselves. Some of the Proverbs, well-known Proverbs tell us this very very starkly, Proverbs 16, just to read there from verse 18 and 19, we know very well, "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud." So Solomon writes for us there. Pride, well, if there's pride, just look a little further down the track, destruction. That person will bring themselves into ruin. It will get the better of them. It will make them act unwisely and it will disaster.

Elsewhere in Proverbs, Proverbs 18:12, very similarly, "Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility." It's the opposite of pride, isn't it, and as we say with Barzillai being humble, humility, not thinking, "I deserve that. Yes, I can see myself there." No, that's not me. I'm not cut out for that and refusing those things. So here it is, honor comes with humility, destruction when a man's heart is proud and it's haughty, lifted up thinking that I'm the man, I'm the woman, it's all me and you just watch. Well, just watch because there will be destruction.

James 4:6 again familiar, it says, "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says," quoting from the Old Testament, "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." The humble, gives grace to them. He withdraws that grace from the proud. That's where we find David, there is a restraint removed and some of God's grace which may have been in proximity there, Nathan perhaps or just the passage of time and the immediacy of a lesson learned, but that restraint is gone and now David's pride comes out and God resists him, that he gets his numbers but he doesn't get any joy from those numbers. Instead he knows he's smitten in conscience.

And the Proverbs again tell us that God is in this, that he will actively oppose the proud. It's his universe, he's a moral God, he's a moral governor, and he will orchestrate downfalls of those who are proud. That was Absalom when he orchestrated his downfall in minute detail. Proverbs 16:5, "Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD," that's strong, isn't it, "Though they join forces, none will go unpunished." There are quite a few people on his team but he didn't go unpunished and proud and may be able to call upon with any number of people in support of what they're doing but that will not save them, their numbers won't save them, they will not go unpunished.

Proud nations. I guess nations can be proud, can't they? That's why we recoil somewhat from nationalism. That would be, perhaps we'd say patriotic and we love what we do love about our nation, we don't hate everything that our nation is as some would encourage us to do, we honor great people that have graced the pages of our human history, but we're not so sure about nationalism, if you like, and pride, wrong pride. Well, we've got our national football team there, don't know quite what they're going to do but we rather hope it doesn't lead to some foolish jingoism and the rest of it which does at times mar our national witness and behavior of our football fans overseas. COVID, I suppose, keeps most of them at home but in past years we've seen some very unpleasant things that made us feel very ashamed as a nation, the wrong kind of pride.

And we know from history that kind of pride in nations and in their rulers can lead to wars and lead to great ruin. Pride in those who govern can actually lead to appalling decision-making, can paralyze government in that way, can lead to misrule and all kinds of difficulty and God opposes that. Pride brings ruin because such people aren't teachable, they can't be taught anything because they kind of know it all already, they are the center of the universe, their every thought is brilliant, and that is ruinous because so it may be with some of our thoughts may be tolerably good, but not every one of those thoughts is anywhere near the mark and if we're not listening to counsel from others who might be just giving us some gentle advice and suggesting that course of action, might not be the wisest but proud people won't listen to it and react strongly against it. They're unteachable and that is always going to lead to ruin.

And stiffnecked. How often God remonstrated with Israel of old that they were stiffnecked, uncircumcised in heart. "They're proud. They're not listening to me. I send them prophets rising early and yet they dismiss the counsel. They think they know better." Well, they don't and they will earn that judgment. And a terrible place it is when the conscience that's perhaps there in Israel of old, it became at times was so hardened, that pride had so won over that even the warnings and the internal mechanisms saying, "Don't do this, it's ruinous," have now been stifled and stopped and too many warnings have been overridden and they perhaps then can be spectacular.

Pride brings ruin, however, my third heading to finish on a happier note is this: the Lord brings good out of our folly. The Lord brings good even out of our folly, even of the most egregious, the most spectacular folly, that out of it God can bring good. Sovereign God, a God who is beyond us here and now, who sees all that we are and knows it in his foreknowledge, but then knows what's beyond it and what he's going to do in it and from it and through it. And even our pride, even our folly, as it did here with David which brought such ruin, but also brought humility, that David, and this is always where we find, yes, he is the man after God's own heart, there is a tenderness of conscience, there was a willingness to own his sin, to repent. And he acknowledges it, doesn't he, before the prophet and he acknowledges it before the angel in verse 17, "Surely," he says as he stood before this mighty angel, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep," the people, "what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house." Well, that's something, isn't it, there that he wants the people to be spared. "It was me. It was my sin. Spare them. They are but sheep."

And the Lord brought good out of David's folly. Good inasmuch as there is David penitent and his tears of repentance showing the genuineness of it doubtless, but it's also the place where God shows mercy to Jerusalem, shows mercy to David as the ruler. He doesn't have more people, as it were, who have died in this plague upon his conscience. He's spared that and that's the location where Gad, the seer, the prophet, tells David by the threshingfloor, also Araunah, he's a Gentile, he's a Jebusite, one of the remaining kind of original inhabitants of Jerusalem still there, some of them remained but obviously very compliant, very respectful of David and all that David stood for, the God that he worshiped. Going by the threshingfloor that is his to build an altar there, make sacrifice there, and that is the beginning, isn't it, of something very very big and very very

significant, for that location where God shows mercy, where he spares the city, is going to be the location now beginning with this altar and the oxen that David buys from Araunah and the way in which he establishes that altar, is actually going to be the location of the temple.

So this building which was in David's heart to build, David was told not for you to do it, your son Solomon is the man to build it, but this is the beginning of the actual location of it and to make preparations, it's in his heart to do. But where? Location. Location. Location. Well, here is the location and David now knows that that is where this plan to have the temple, this glorious and beautiful building, but whose main purpose and function is the dwellingplace of God, is where propitiation for sin can be made. Here is where the high priest on the Day of Atonement will enter behind the curtain, only on that day and bringing blood for his own sin and atone for the sins of the nation, and where the routine sacrifices each Sabbath day will be offered, and the people will come with their thank offerings and with their burnt offerings, where all the feasts will be observed, tabernacles, the feast of weeks and Passover. And each and every one of them will have prescribed regulations for sacrifice, animal sacrifice, blood that must be shed and which must be properly properly handled and dealt with, the priests the only people who can officiate.

So that location where propitiation, the taking away of the wrath of God, the shedding of blood that through that God then will be satisfied in that, and his wrath against the sinner will be taken away, that that blood that was shed, that suffices, that will act as a substitute for that person, that blood of that bull, that blood of that lamb, that will suffice. And now places there where this will be able to be conducted day in, day out, year in, year out. God's wrath will be removed from the people, removed from the worship. But of course, there's something even greater lying beyond that and it speaks to us here of a plan that is in the mind of God from eternity, that is something greater than the temple, doing greater than any bull, any calf, any lamb could offer, that while that could be a substitute for that time, it couldn't really substitute finally for our deeper soul's need to have one indeed to die in our place before a holy God to bring full propitiation, to take away the wrath of God from us and completely utterly remove it that it never again will come upon us in that form of final ultimate condemnation and judgment and we needed one of our nature to be able to do that. It needed someone like us, in us in all particulars yet without sin. And it needed someone quite unlike us, it needed actually God to be this person too.

So here's the God-man, he is Jesus Christ who is going to make propitiation for our sins, placed himself there. He will be the one to receive the wrath of God. His blood will be offered up here in the temple as here it begins to emerge where it's going to be, and the sacrifices that can be made, preparation for the final revealing of God's ultimate plan for the removal of sin, Jesus Christ our Lord and our Savior.

So there's David's folly, there's his pride, there's his repentance, and there's God's mercy. God is propitiating there that David's repentance and prayer for the people, Jerusalem is spared. And that location is then going to be the place where God's mercy is to be shown, propitiation of his wrath in the temple. The greater things remain to come and will come

and this is just another step along the way, the promises that David has that his house, his dynasty is going to be the place from which that true Savior will come. Well, here is a building as well that is part of that story. David's connected with that even though he's not to be the man to build it but he is the man certainly who had it in his heart and here in a significant way even his folly God has brought about the good of having a location obtained where these greater things that are a part of even greater things to come will be accomplished. What a God that we serve, that even our deadly pride doesn't have the last word in this, even our sin to our shame can bring us so low even as believers, even as spiritual men and women, how we can fall and yet God can use us, take us even our fall, even our mistakes, even the things that happen to us, we can learn from and come out it actually stronger.

So never despair at whatever it might have been, pride, whatever else we've been ambushed by perhaps even of late. Don't despair. Come to the Lord as David did, confessed his sin and God has a remarkable way of being able to take us from that place and put into action unimaginably good things. So that is the God that David knew and what a privilege the God that we know as well.

DEADLY PRIDE: 2 Samuel 24.

Reading: 2 Samuel 24.

We are coming towards the end of David's life. There are still some good themes to explore from this period of David's life. But there are also some lessons that David and the nation with him still needed to learn.

Nations can sometimes have particular traits and characteristics which, if not kept in check by wise rulers, can become a difficulty. This is all the more a problem if those characteristics are actually shared by the ruler as well. The nation had already been humbled by the requirement to satisfy the law regarding the ill treatment of the Gibeonites by Saul (1 Samuel 21). Although this action is not an example of what should happen today, it showed that the Lord did not hold the people guiltless for the way they had allowed the Gibeonites to be treated by Saul. People might try to forget past wrongs committed by nations against other nations. The Lord, however, does not forget.

1. Ambushed by pride.

Pride seems to be the problem that surfaces in David's and the nation's heart by the incident of the census-taking in 1 Samuel 24. There was an allowance made in the law of Moses for a census to be carried out but it was to be done in conjunction with the levying of a tax. This was the only permissible reason for taking a census of the people. But no tax was being levied here. It was David taking pride in the number of men he had the rule over. Even Joab bridled at the thought of doing this and remonstrated with David. But David would not be deterred.

Pride is endemic in the sinful human heart. We think we are the most important people on earth and that we are too important to fail. We can deceive ourselves into thinking we are so special that we are above the law and can do things that other people cannot.

David could be very wise, as occasion demanded, but here he is so foolish. He is ambushed by his pride which gets the better of him. It is worth asking the question why this surfaced now. Perhaps some restraint, such as the ministry of Nathan, was no longer there to act as a check. Perhaps the lessons to be learnt from Absalom's behaviour, including his pride, had been forgotten or that David thought he had learnt all there was to learn and had become complacent. Nebuchadnezzar displayed pride in his heart when he surveyed the great city of Babylon and attributed its glory to himself, earning the judgment of God in the process.

Pride is never totally vanquished in the human heart. It can still rise up against us. It is listed in 1 John 2:15-17 as one of the great difficulties that we face. It means that we should always be suspicious of ourselves and who we are at heart. We should

always be vigilant and watchful, observing ourselves carefully when we react to things or are prone to get angry. In our battle against pride, we should always be ready to deny ourselves and exercise self-control. We must guard against the temptation to want to put ourselves in a place where we can be admired and well thought of.

A good example of someone who did not fall for pride in old age is Barzillai (2 Samuel 19:33-35) who refused the benefits that David offered him because of the infirmities of his old age. In other words, he was humble, unlike David is in this passage which also happened when he was older.

2. Pride brings ruin.

As we have seen in previous sermons, it is a moral universe and the Lord does not allow sin to continue unchecked or unjudged. Rather, pride has an inbuilt tendency to bring ruin upon the person (Proverbs 16:18-19; Proverbs 18:12; James 4:6). Proud nations and proud rulers may end up involved in ruinous wars. Governments may be paralysed by unsuitable but proud people filling roles that they are not qualified for.

Proud people are opposed by the Lord Himself (Proverbs 16:5). They are unteachable and so are liable to get into difficulties of their own making. They can be stiff-necked, not listening to advice, and so bring ruin on themselves through poor decision-making. Over time, they may harden their consciences and bring on themselves some spectacular collapse by having over-ridden too many warnings.

3. But the Lord brings good out of our folly.

Pride is an ultimate kind of folly. Yet the Lord can bring good out of it for His name's sake. In this situation, the Lord overrules David's folly by securing a site for the building of the temple. This is an act of great mercy and grace because it is an important part of God's plan to bless us all. It was in David's heart to build a house for the Lord. Solomon was the man to do that work, not David.

This is the location where propitiation of God's anger is effected by the sacrifice David offers. It brings an end to the angel's judgment of the people. In the future it is going to be the place where regular sacrifices will be made to avert the Lord's anger against His people. But it points on to a greater day when the Lord Jesus Christ will make the final sacrifice of Himself and complete the work of propitiation on our behalf.