

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2019 New Year!

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In order to trust God, it requires faith! *What if God doesn't come through? What if God oversleeps? What if God forgets about me? What if God doesn't come through for me? I think I'd like to be more self-sufficient!* And so, our time and our money are invested in ourselves. *I want to be in charge of my own pleasure. I want to be in charge of my own safety. I want to be in charge of my own security. I want to be in charge of my own retirement. I want to be self-sufficient.* That's why God moves so far down the priority list. It's the same thing David was struggling with.

Verse 10:

Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So, 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 acted very foolishly."

We really aren't told exactly what transpired, but somewhere in the journey of taking the census and getting the numbers in, David realizes the foolishness of his decision. He is clearly confessing his sin and repenting before God. If you read the story of Saul and the story of David, the difference between the greatest king of Israel and a failed king was not that Saul made mistakes and David didn't; both made mistakes. The clear and obvious difference was that David had a pattern of confession and repentance when he sinned. Saul never figured that out; always excuses, always reasons. He never really figured out what it meant to confess and repent of his sin before God. That was the difference. David is convicted. He confesses. He repents.

Then the text takes a strange turn. God sends the prophet Gad and the prophet gives David three choices for his judgment. Now remember, God is angry with Israel for their sin, and now with David for his sin. So, there are three options: (1) You could have years of famine and drought in the land; (2) an invading army that will defeat you, or (3) three days of pestilence (disease). David opts for the pestilence.

So, we pick it up in Verse 15:

So, the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now relax 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 down the people, and said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned,

and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house." (Vs. 15-17)

So pestilence hits the land; thousands of people die. The angel of the LORD is moving into Jerusalem, comes to the threshing floor of Araunah, and God stops the angel and tells him, "That's enough!" David then pleads with God, "This is my fault. This is my sin. The people shouldn't have to die for my sin!" It's a clear indication of David's brokenness and confession and repentance. He asks God to judge him and his household, not the people.

Verse 18:

So Gad came to David that day and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded. Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over toward him; and Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king. Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be held back from the people." Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you." (Vs. 18-23)

David is told to go to the threshing floor where the angel of the LORD stopped and withheld his hand and there offer a sacrifice. So, David is heading up to the threshing floor. Araunah sees him coming, goes down to meet him, and asks him what he's doing. David explains. Araunah says, "I'll tell you what; I'll give you the land; I'll give you the oxen; I'll give you the wood; I'll give you everything you need." At first glance, it seems like this is a great deal; it will cost David nothing! Free land! Free oxen! Free wood! Light the match; light it on fire. Offer the sacrifice. Go through the motions. Check it off the list. Mission accomplished. However, David does not respond that way!

Verse 24:

However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." So, David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus, the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel. (Vs. 24-25)

David refuses Araunah's gift. The reason? Because he will not offer to God that which costs him nothing. The very essence of worship is sacrifice. Sacrifice, by its very definition, *costs* us something. It's not about giving the leftovers of my time, the leftovers of my money. It's about the cost! David said, "I will not give to God that which costs me nothing!" I'm not asking you, "Do you have some leftover time and money that you can throw at God?" I *am* asking, "What will it cost you to be a serious Christ-follower? How much does it matter to you?"

This has been the story from the beginning. You go all the way back to the story of Cain and Abel. This is at the heartbeat of that story. Abel pleased God because Abel gave the best that he had. Cain displeased God because Cain gave God some grain, a little grain he could spare. It's always been about: *What will this cost you?*

It's interesting that this sacrifice happened on the threshing floor of Araunah because that is a familiar place. It's called Mount Moriah. It's the place where, years before, a man by the name of Abraham was called by God to offer and sacrifice the thing in his life that mattered the most—his very own son, Isaac. It would be that very same place where David's son Solomon would build the temple of God. And there, year after year after year, the people would offer sacrifices which, by its very definition, are costly. It would cost the people dearly to offer up their sacrifices to God. It is the place where, one day, God would send His own Son to be crucified on a cross for your sin and mine.

Our salvation is offered freely—but it is not cheap! It cost God the life of His very own Son. When Jesus walked this earth, Jesus could not have been clearer. Again and again, He said: *If you're going to follow me, you have to count the cost, because it will cost you.* At no time did Jesus promote a message of health and wealth and prosperity. Pretty much, the opposite! Jesus said: *You need to understand, if you're going to follow Me, it will cost you! You will have to deny yourself. You will have to take up your cross daily to follow me.* The more Jesus declared that message, the more the multitudes shrunk down, down, down, to the point where, when Jesus was arrested, it was a relatively small group of people who had counted the cost and said: *I will follow Jesus.*

It's never been about negotiable time or money. It's always been about: *What will it cost you to be a serious Christ-follower?* Let me give you a couple of things to think about as we wrap this up.

Probably most of us have somewhat of a love/hate relationship with technology. Me, personally, it's much more hate than love. I mean, really, what is the problem with an overhead projector? *[Laughter]* Seems to me that it works just fine!

Several years ago, we started the live stream on our website, which means Saturday night and the two services on Sunday and special events like Christmas Eve are streamed live from the website. It was in order to accommodate the elderly, the shut-ins, the sick, our missionaries. And for that purpose, it has served us very well. But there is what we call “the law of unintended consequences”. Part of what has transpired causes us to wonder, “*Should we shut it down?*” because it has become so convenient for people to choose to just sleep in, stay at home, turn on the computer, and watch the service on television. Check the box: *I went to church today; call it good,* and that's fine. That's fine, if you're nothing more than a consumer and you want nothing more than to watch television.

But worship is something different and it's something much more. Worship is when the people of God gather together as flesh and blood human beings, to come together as the people of God to worship! There's no place in our culture where our Christian faith makes sense except when we're together. The New Testament refers to us as citizens of Heaven; therefore, we're resident aliens on Earth! Every weekend we have a resident alien convention and we gather together with

fellow aliens. This is the only context in which our choices and our lifestyle actually make sense—when we're together with our brothers and sisters in Christ!

One of the challenges is when we think of Sunday as the Sabbath. Now first of all, there are big theological problems with that, but in addition, in our minds, it's a day off. I would suggest to you that it's *not* a day off. It's a day *on*! This is the day when the people of God gather together. Every weekend people walk through these doors. They are hurting; they are struggling; they are in despair. They're wondering, if there's a reason to go on one more day of living. There are people among us that are dying, that are hopeless. We come together and together we say: *We'll do this together. We're going to love each other. We're going to serve each other. We're going to be committed to each other. And together, as the people of God, we will get through this.* We remind ourselves what matters. We remind ourselves what's important. It's *not* a day off; it's very much a day *on*! We cannot afford to lose that.

Every week you manage to get out of bed to go to work. You manage to get out of bed to go to school. You manage to get out of bed to do everything else. Why can't we discipline ourselves to get out of bed and make it a rhythm in our lives that the people of God gather and worship and remind ourselves of what's true and what matters and what we live for? For some of you this year, maybe that's where it needs to start—a weekly rhythm of being reminded of what's true and what matters and who we are as the people of God. Not just if there's nothing else to do, not just if it's convenient, but to make it our priority! What will it cost *you* to be serious about this Jesus thing?

It's not just about attending a service. It's far more comprehensive than that. It's holistic. It's about you at school. It's about you at work. It's about you in your neighborhood. It's about you in your hobbies. What will it cost you to be serious about being a Christ-follower? It will cost you *time*. It will cost you *money*. It may cost you *relationships*. It may cost you some *discomfort*. What will it cost *you* to be really serious about being a Christ-follower?

It *does* cost you! Every week it costs you time; it costs you money; you sacrifice week after week after week to live for the things that matter. Hopefully, in a message like this, it's just a reminder for you that you are living the right way. It is hard, week after week after week, to live out of step with the culture.

There are times when you think, "Is it worth it?" I hope that at times like this it can be a reminder that it *is* worth it! One day you're going to get to the end of your story and look back with no regrets and realize, "I had one shot at life and, thankfully, I invested my life in the things that will matter forever."

What will it cost you to be a serious Christ-follower?

Father, we celebrate Your goodness and Your grace. Your salvation that's freely offered to us—but to You, it came at great cost. God, we celebrate that You've called us to live with meaning and purpose, that there is that for which we can live for, that will still matter a thousand years from now. My prayer for every single one of us is that we would live for the things that matter, that we would invest our time, that we would invest our money, that we would invest our hearts in the things that will last forever—for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Arnie: Bryan, I think you just gave us a good start for a New Year's resolution.

Bryan: Well, it's a valid question to ask, isn't it? What does it cost me to follow Jesus? It's about my priorities and values and my willingness to sacrifice.

Cara: When we talk about worship, we're usually referring to what happens on Sunday mornings in church. But that's a very narrow definition. Would you help us understand the real meaning behind worship?

Bryan: Sure. So, worship is a way of life. So, you might say when we gather, that's the culmination of how we've lived all week long. So, thinking of worship as ascribing worth to God. So, it translates into my values and priorities all week long, every day.

Arnie: How do we see sacrifice as something we *get* to do instead of something we *have* to do?

Bryan: Yeah, that's a great question actually. I think to see it as the expression of my gratitude and my love for God. So, I'd compare it with my kids, when I have a chance to give them money or time or energy. So, whether I spend time fixing or remodeling something at their house, or I just give them money for something, is it a sacrifice? It is. I don't have a lot of leftover time or money to give, but what makes it so meaningful is, it's an expression of my love for them, and it brings me great joy to do that for them. So just the other day, I offered one of my daughters some money for something, and she said, "Dad, you don't have to do that." I said, "I know, but it makes me happy to do it." So why would that be different from God? It makes me happy to have a chance to express to God how much I love Him and how much gratitude I have for what He's done for me.

Cara: If we feel like we have to give, do you think God wants that money?

Bryan: I think it does come to motive and why we give. So, it's like I have to give, what? - so God doesn't whack me? I have to give, so God will bless me? I have to give, because that's the rule? [Right] You know, all of that's missing it. It's like saying I have to go on a date with my wife. It's like kind of missing the point there.

Cara: So, the threshing floor of Araunah had a lot of history to it, and that history would continue.

Bryan: Yeah, that's a key place. It's the place where the ultimate sacrifice would be paid for us. It's a place where our salvation would be paid for. You know, we're reminded our salvation was free to us, but it wasn't cheap. That cost was unimaginable, and the cost was in the same place where David made that offering to God.