



December 23, 2018

2 Samuel 24

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The Sacrificial Altar of the King

Hi Everyone. My name is Larry Adams and I want to take a moment to thank you for reading this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the Word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us, as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God's Word all over the world.

We want you to know, too, that in no way do we intend these messages to be a replacement for your involvement in a good local church, where, sitting under the authority of pastors and other teachers, you can learn to worship, grow and serve and be engaged with a body of believers where you can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We realize also, that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we hope these messages you are using, to gather with your family or other believers, or people from the community that it will be a great encouragement to you, as you hear God speak into your life, helping you to become disciples who are true, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

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We have spent together, over these last two months, a series of messages called *Regalia: The Rise of the Kingdom*. Regalia has to do with all that pertains to the king and his kingdom. We've been learning through the rise of King David's leadership, all the parallels between him and King Jesus, and the kingdom He is coming to reign over forever and ever.

When you get to chapter 24 of 2 Samuel, it doesn't start out very well. David has decided to sin against God. He goes out to count his troops. We'll find out why that was a bad deal and that God told him not to do it. And he realizes his guilt, he cries out to God for forgiveness and, as David was about to learn, there is no forgiveness without a cost. There is no forgiveness without a sacrifice.

So, what starts out poorly in 2 Samuel 24, ends with a great message of hope for you and me and all of us this Christmas season: this is why Jesus came. Here is how it is recorded for us (2 Samuel 24:1-10)

24 Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah."

² So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, "Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are."

³ But Joab replied to the king, "May the LORD your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?"

⁴ The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel.

⁵ After crossing the Jordan, they camped near Aroer, south of the town in the gorge, and then went through Gad and on to Jazer. ⁶ They went to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi, and on to Dan Jaan and around toward Sidon. ⁷ Then they went toward the fortress of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah.

⁸ After they had gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

⁹ Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king: In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand.

¹⁰ David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."

God, all of us can relate to David. We too have sinned and at times, done very foolish things. We, like him, have cried out for the forgiveness of our guilt. We have been reminded that there is no forgiveness without a sacrifice. Jesus, this is why You came: to glorify God and to redeem man, to be our king and our priest and our sacrifice. I pray today, as we open up this word, on this Sunday before Christmas, that we'll have an ever greater and deeper appreciation for why You've come the first time, and why You're coming again as king. There is an altar for the sacrifice, the king's altar, and there is where we find our forgiveness. We thank You, God, for this reminder. In Jesus' name, amen.

Christmas is a crazy time. Karla and I were talking this morning about a lady we read about. It was nearing Christmas Day and she suddenly realized – I forgot to send out any cards! I didn't even buy them! So she raced to the store. You know what's happening, a couple days before Christmas everything is picked over. She was hoping to find a couple boxes that were good, or cute, or the same. She found these adorable little cards, two boxes. She grabbed them, paid for them, went home, filled them out, signed them, stuck labels on them and quickly got them into the mail. The next day she was relaxing and she noticed that there were a couple cards left in the box. She thought, I'll see what I said to all those people. So she opened up the Christmas card and this is what it said:

This little card is here to say
That your Christmas gift is on its way!

You think you have pressure! Christmas time can be a time full of pressure, but in the midst of it all, we have to hold on to the meaning of what it is all about. We hear it all the time – Christmas is the time we celebrate the miracle of God becoming a man. God became a man! He came in human flesh, born to a bewildered couple, in a stable out behind an inn, in the little town of Bethlehem. He was born in a manger, but the manger has always stood in the shadow of the cross. Jesus came to reveal God, but He also came to redeem man. And there would be a cost, because mankind's greatest need was a king and a priest and a perfect sacrifice, because man's greatest need is forgiveness. Not just forgiveness in general. We need forgiveness from God. In Jesus, God meets that need.

Jesus is the king who intercedes as a priest for us, with God, and offers the perfect sacrifice. Such is the person of Jesus, but also all of that was foreshadowed in the person of David.

Today, we conclude our series in 1 and 2 Samuel, *Regalia: the Rise of the Kingdom*. We've been learning about all the ways God established the kingdom of David as a foreshadowing of giving rise to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, that would be forever. David was chosen by God to be His anointed king

and established the line through which the descendants would come, leading ultimately to King Jesus. In this series, we've seen about the glory of the king. We've seen the differences between the king that man chooses, and the king that God chooses. We've learned about the heart of the king, how God developed the king's leadership, his character, and established his reign. We've learned about the covenant of the king – how God came to David and promised him that through his line would come an ultimate king to sit on his throne, whose reign would be forever and ever. We saw the rebellion against the king, and how the king had to go away for a season. But the king returned and sat on his throne to reign in grace and truth and justice and righteousness.

Today, in the book of 2 Samuel, it closes with David as king, interceding as a priest and offering himself as a sacrifice to save the people from his sin. God was angry with Israel. It doesn't tell us why, but it says that He incited David to take a numbering of his troops. When you read the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 21, you learn that it wasn't actually God who incited him; it was Satan who did it. God uses, in His sovereignty, both good and evil. He can use Satan and anyone else to accomplish His purposes. By David being incited to go out and number the troops – as sinful as it was – David gave in to that, and God would now work sovereignly to use that to bring about an ultimate good.

God told David that his strength was to be in God, not in his troops. But at this stage of David's life, he found more comfort, more security, more pride, more strength – in the size of his army. So he tells his leading general, Joab, and the other commanders – I want you to go out and count the men so I know how many I have, to fight these wars. They are our strength.

The number came back: 1.3 million. God was angered by that. God had told David, your strength isn't in the size of your army; your strength is in Me. You don't need to worry about how big your army is; just trust in Me. It wasn't the size of your army that has delivered you all these times – it was Me. So you don't need to be counting them. But David did it anyway, out of pride and rebellion.

It tells us in verse 10, that David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men. He said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, Lord, I beg You, take away the guilt of Your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."

Take away the guilt of Your servant! Forgive me, God! I was wrong! I was foolish!

But there would be no forgiveness without a sacrifice. So, God speaks to David's prophet, Gad. He sends him to David with these choices. God, through Gad, says to David, (v 13-17) you have three choices – none of them good. They all involve death because the wages of sin is death.

¹³ So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come on you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me."

¹⁴ David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands."

¹⁵ So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. ¹⁶ When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁷ When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, “I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.”

The king, interceding like a priest, and offering himself as the sacrifice. The very same thing that Jesus would do.

So David buys the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite because God said, David – you will not be the sacrifice, but you will build an altar for My sacrifice. So David builds an altar on that site, and offers sacrifices for sin.

The book closes with these words:

²⁴ ...So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.

²⁵ David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD answered his prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

God judging sin. Humanity facing the penalty of death. God intervening, and providing a sacrifice to die in David's place on an altar that God would establish to bring forgiveness for the people.

Samuel reminds us that, as with King David, God would also provide a sacrificial altar for King Jesus. Why was there a need for a sacrificial altar? Because there is no forgiveness without a sacrifice. Samuel recorded it in vs 18-24:

¹⁸ On that day Gad went to David and said to him, “Go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” ¹⁹ So David went up, as the LORD had commanded through Gad. ²⁰ When Araunah looked and saw the king and his officials coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.

²¹ Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?”

“To buy your threshing floor,” David answered, “so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped.”

²² Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take whatever he wishes and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. ²³ Your Majesty, Araunah gives all this to the king.” Araunah also said to him, “May the LORD your God accept you.”

²⁴ But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen. He paid 50 shekels of silver for them. David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered his prayer on behalf of the land. The plague on Israel was stopped.

There is no forgiveness without the payment of a debt.

Joshua Ryan Butler wrote a book called *The Pursuing God* (Thomas Nelson, 2016). In that book, he asked the question, “Why can’t God just forgive the debt of sin?” He said:

If our creator was truly generous, couldn’t he just move on without repayment? Live and let live? Here’s the problem: someone always eats the cost of sin. As a simple example, let’s say your neighbor crashes his car through your fence. When you discover the shambles, you forgive him: “Don’t worry about the fence! All is forgiven.” But forgiving your neighbor doesn’t do away with the bill or dissolve the damage; it means you eat the cost.

Now consider a more complex example. During the US housing crises, shoddy banking practices, fat-cat executives, and corporate corruption threw a sledgehammer into the global economy. Now, imagine Jesus is installed in the aftermath as the new CEO of one of the massive corporations guilty for the crisis. The old CEO is out the door; a new boss is in town. Jesus is personally innocent: he wasn’t behind the wheel when the ship got steered into the rocks. But there’s still a huge debt. Bank of America alone owed people \$17 billion.

Someone has to pay the costs. Here’s what actually happened: in the aftermath of the housing crisis, the banks were deemed “too big to fail” and the government forgave the debt, covering the most expensive bailout of human history. Though the banking industry had caused massive damage, the debt was forgiven. But the debt didn’t go away. Someone else covered it – in this case, the American people. Someone always eats the cost.

At the Cross, God was eating the cost of our sin. Why can’t God just forgive the debt? This is what is happening at the Cross: God is just(ly) forgiving the debt – by personally covering the cost. I misspoke when I said the White House gave Wall Street the most expensive bailout of human history. Actually, the most expensive bailout was when the Father established his incarnate Son as the new CEO of a corrupt corporation called Humanity Inc, and together, in the power of their Spirit, they took upon themselves the most outrageous debt-forgiveness plan the world has ever known.

Sin has a debt. The wages of sin is death. God can forgive the sin, but the debt has to be paid. Sin has a cost – it’s death. So we pay it, or God paid it.

That’s why David’s sin brought death. No matter which option of punishment he chose, because the wages of sin is death. David recognized his sin of pride and disobedience, of impugning God and relying on his own strength, rather than God’s word. He cried out to God for forgiveness. So God gave him those three options. David said, I can’t pick! Just let me fall on the mercy of God, and not the hands of men.

So God sent the plague among the people. 70,000 of the people died in three days!

That phrase that Samuel uses (70,000 of the people) is a phrase that could mean “70,000 of the people who were counted.” If that’s true, then it means God was saying to David – you put your strength in the size of your army. In three days, I’m going to reduce that army by 70,000 men, because your hope is not in your army. Your hope is in Me.

Sin has a price. If there is to be forgiveness, someone has to die. The debt has to be paid.

So watch what happens next (v 16)

¹⁶ When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

And you read in verse 17:

¹⁷ When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, "I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family."

David is the king, interceding as the priest, and offering himself as the sacrifice. It is exactly what Jesus would one day do. Jesus, the king, interceding as our priest, offering Himself on an altar of a cross, as our sacrifice.

But God intervenes and saves David. He told him, you will not be the sacrifice, but you will establish an altar on which the sacrifices to make atonement for your sin will be made. When the angel of the Lord put his sword back in its sheath, he was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

The Jebusites were a conquered people. They lived in the area of Jerusalem. When David came and conquered that city and region, he established the City of David there and drove the Jebusites out. Araunah may have been one of their former kings, but he had a threshing floor on a hill, just north of the City of David, on the eastern part of town. It was outside the city. It was a flat, level place on a hill, where the wind could easily come and as he shifted the wheat, it would blow the chaff away. It was the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

This threshing floor was on a hill. The hill that the ancients used to call Mount Moriah. It was the same hill that Abraham once climbed with his son Isaac, to sacrifice his son on an altar that God said to build on that mountain. But when Abraham raised the knife, remember – God intervened and stopped him. Just like the angel who raised his sword over Jerusalem on that same site – God intervened and stopped him; He said, "Enough." God would provide the sacrifice. God provided a substitute to save Isaac. God would provide a substitute to save David. And God has provided a substitute to save you and me.

So God tells David, "Build an altar and sacrifice on the very spot God told Abraham to do the same." So David bought the threshing floor of Araunah. He refuses to take it for free, for he said I will not offer sacrifices that cost me nothing. So on that altar, David offers up burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.

There are five Old Testament offerings. They all point to Jesus. God wanted the sacrifice to be lifted up on an altar, on a hill, outside the city. Jesus would one day be lifted up as our sacrifice on the altar of a cross, on a hill, outside the city. Jesus would be our burnt offering.

In a **burnt offering**, the sin-bearer, the animal, was not dying for a specific sin, but for all the sins resulting from those who are not fully, wholly devoted to God. So they would take the animal and prepare it. They would place it on the altar and it would be completely burned – completely given over to God. And when that burned offering was presented like that, the person presenting the animal was saying, "As this sacrifice is wholly given to You, God, so now through this sacrifice, my life is wholly devoted to You. I'm holding nothing back." Jesus is our burnt offering. He was wholly devoted to God, completely given over to God, holding nothing back.

When you and I become Christians, when we ask this Jesus to come into our lives, He is our burnt offering. We are coming through Jesus, as our burnt offering, to say to God – through this offering, I now receive Christ and He is my burnt offering. Now I am wholly devoted to You. I'm holding nothing back. That's what it means to be a Christian. That's what it means to accept Christ as your burnt offering sacrifice.

But Jesus would also be the **fellowship offering**, also called a peace offering. Established to create peace or fellowship in three spheres: peace with God, peace with others, and peace within. Peace comes from knowing that you've been forgiven, that you are at peace with God.

David offered a fellowship offering, acknowledging that through this sacrifice, his sin was forgiven, the barrier was removed and he is now at peace with God and his fellow men. David had caused the death of these people.

Jesus is our fellowship offering. By His sacrifice, our sin is forgiven and we're at peace with God. That's why Paul, the great sinner, the chief of sinners! – wrote (Romans 5:1), "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is why John would later write about fellowship with God and what it looks like. Wholly devoted to God, but if you're living in fellowship with God, then it translates to how you live with your fellow man. 1 John 1:5-7, John wrote:

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

See that? God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to be living in fellowship with God, in other words, we have accepted Jesus as our fellowship offering to make peace between us and God, we don't live for ourselves any more; we live for Him who died for us and rose again. So John said, when you accept this fellowship offering of Jesus at the cross, when you invited Christ to come and live in your life, what you're saying is, I'm living in fellowship with the God who is light – so in me there can be no darkness. I can't say I'm following Jesus and living in sin intentionally. If you claim that, you're lying. When you accept Christ into your life, He is your fellowship offering and makes peace with God and peace with man.

This site, Araunah's threshing floor, would become even more significant than David could have imagined. It tells us in the parallel passage to this (1 Chronicles 22:1) - after seeing all this, "David said, 'The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.'" This is where the temple would be cited. So David began to make plans for the temple that his son Solomon would build. It was on this temple site that Jesus would do so much of His teaching. When that temple was constructed, God came to dwell in that temple, in the Holy of Holies, the fullness of God's glory dwelt with man. This is where people could come to meet God.

When Jesus lived out His ministry on earth, He said He was the temple of God. The fullness of God dwelt in Him. He was God in human flesh. "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father," Jesus said. So Jesus was the temple where people could meet with God. Someday, Jesus is going to return. He is going to take His seat in a re-built temple, but until that time, where is the temple of God today? Where is the place where people meet with God because He dwells in that temple? It's you and me! We're the temple of God. We are the temple of God corporately and individually.

Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 --

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

When you become a Christian, you become part of a body. It's called the church. It's the body of Christ. Christ is seated at the right hand of God but He is living by His Spirit in His body on earth. We are the visible presence of Jesus in the world. We are His temple, His church. It's through our lives that people can still encounter God. They can see His glory. They can meet with God and hear the good news and know how they can have peace with God. We together as His church, are the temple of God.

But it isn't just the church corporately. Each of us individually is God's temple. Our bodies are a temple, His Holy Spirit. Paul went on to say in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you are bought with a price, therefore honor God with your bodies."

Jesus lives in me. If you're a Christian, Jesus is living in you. This body doesn't belong to me any more. I'm going to carry this around until God is done with it. Your body doesn't belong to you either, if you're a Christian. Jesus is living in your body to take you where He wants you to go; to do what He wants you to do; to say what He wants you to say; to be what He wants you to be. Wherever you are, you are His temple.

This is where people meet God, when they meet us.

So, if we individually and corporately are God's temple, His altar, then what are the sacrifices we offer? First of all, we offer these bodies, our very lives – like a burnt offering, wholly devoted to God. Paul said (Romans 12:1-2) --

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

You see, we offer our lives up to God as a whole burnt offering. We hold nothing back.

We offer up our lives for God's praise and to live for the good of others like a fellowship offering to God. Hebrews 13:15-16 –

¹⁵ Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. ¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

So we live our lives like a fellowship offering. I'm living at peace with God. The fruit of that peace is on our lips. We're telling people how they can have peace with God, and by the way we treat them, the way we respect them, the way we live among them – we're demonstrating that we're at peace with God and they too can be at peace with God. God said that kind of sacrifice – living like that – is pleasing to Him. It's an acceptable sacrifice.

There is a cost for forgiveness. The debt has to be paid. David paid it. When Araunah offered the oxen and threshing sledges and the yoke for the wood, everything he needed to prepare and give the burnt offering and the fellowship offering. But David said no, I will not offer to God a sacrifice that cost me nothing. So David paid.

Jesus paid. It tells us (Hebrews 9:24-28) –

²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the **sacrifice of himself**.

Jesus paid it all. That's why the writer of Hebrews went on to say:

²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Are you excitedly, expectantly waiting for the return of our King Jesus Christ? (applause). He is coming again! This is why Jesus came the first time. Christmas is the celebration that the one who would be our king, our priest and our sacrifice – has come! This is why God spoke to Isaiah (9:6-7) –

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

This is why the angel came and told Mary (Luke 1:30-33) –

³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. **The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,** ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

This is why the angel came to Joseph when he found out Mary was having a baby, not by him. She said God did it – a little tough to swallow. So he is deciding – I'll put her away quietly. God appeared to him in a dream (Matthew 1:20-21) :

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins."

*Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew word "Joshua" which means "Jehovah is salvation." You're going to give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.

This is why the angel sang the way they did the night Jesus was born, to a group of terrified shepherds on a hillside outside Bethlehem (Luke 2:1014) –

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Our great sacrifice, Jesus, our whole devoted burnt offering, our fellowship and our peace with God.

About 30 years ago I got a Christmas card. The front of it had a message that, every year at this time, I try to read to remind myself of what this season is about, and how much I have to be thankful for. No matter what circumstances may be going on in my life. I've kept this card all these years because it is a precious reminder to me, of who Jesus really is and why He came. It simply says:

If our greatest need had been information
God would have sent us an educator.

If our greatest need had been technology
God would have sent us a scientist.

If our greatest need had been money
God would have sent us an economist.

If our greatest need had been pleasure
God would have sent us an entertainer.

But our greatest need was for forgiveness
So God sent us a savior.

A savior who is our sacrifice.

Do you know this Jesus today? Sincerely – do you know Him? Not just about Him? Do you know Him? Because you see, there is no forgiveness without a sacrifice. It can't be just any sacrifice. There is only one. There aren't many options for your sin to be forgiven. There aren't many options for eternal life.

If you go to your local Starbucks, you have many options. (I don't go to Starbucks, but I've been there two or three times. I don't really drink coffee – my mother-in-law drinks enough our entire family, in fact she probably drinks enough for all of you! That's why she is 97 and still going!) Anyway, I was in a Starbucks to get my mother-in-law a cup of coffee. Now I wasn't prepared for what was up on the board. It was overwhelming. Words and terminology – I have no idea what that stuff is. Still don't. I said to the guy, "I just want to get a cup of coffee." The guy said, "A what?" I said, "Just a plain cup of coffee." Apparently they have a name for that too. I can't remember what it is. If you know the code, he knows right away what it is. So we finally figured it out and I got a plain cup of black coffee, which is probably the only one he has sold in that last 10 years! I was reading this article by Brian Kohout from North Carolina. He apparently goes to Starbucks quite a bit. He said:

At your Starbucks you have lots of options. You could start by ordering a tall non-fat latte with caramel drizzle. Or a grande iced, sugar-free vanilla latte with soy milk. Or how about a decaf soy latte with an extra shot and cream? Or a non-fat Frappuccino with extra whipped cream and chocolate sauce? But don't forget the venti iced skinny hazelnut macchiato sugar-free syrup, extra shot, light ice, no whip?

(Seriously – I have no idea what these are. I know what whipped cream is, but the rest of it --?)

According to Starbucks' global chief marketing officer, the company can offer you 80,000 drink options! 80,000 options for your coffee!

There may be 80,000 options to satisfy your need for coffee, but there is only one option to satisfy your need for forgiveness.

Peter said in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

That name is Jesus. The whole Old Testament – the whole Bible speaks of it. God's written word is the revelation of the Living Word. He appears on every page. It's a joyous discovery to find Him there every day.

This Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We beheld His glory (John said), the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. This Living Word is our king, our priest and our sacrifice. This Living Word is establishing His kingdom. 1 and 2 Samuel have been all about the king and the rise of his kingdom. The kings that came through David's line had many names, but they all led to the one who has the name above every name. Just as God established David's throne, so too He promised to establish the throne of David's greater son, Jesus. That's why God told Isaiah (9:7) --

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

Regalia – it's all about the rise of His kingdom. When Jesus comes again, when He takes His seat on David's throne, everything that God has promised will come true. He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will reign with justice and righteousness. His kingdom will never end. I can hardly wait for His coming. He came before; He is coming again. We're looking forward to it as God's people.

Father, thank You for this Christmas season that reminds us that, not only have You come, but You are coming again. You are coming again not to die on an altar; You're coming to reign on a throne. I thank You God for who You are. I thank You for all You have paid for my forgiveness, for our forgiveness. I thank You that You are still offering life to those who, by faith, will receive it, for there are not 80,000 options. There is only one. It's You, Jesus. You're the only one.

That's why today, I want to ask you, do you have this living Jesus living in you? Do you know that you are a sinner today? And that God loves you very much? Do you know that you need forgiveness from God, or you'll be separated from Him forever? Do you know that God so loved you that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life? Do you believe that Jesus is your burnt offering? That He is your fellowship offering? Wholly devoted to God, making peace between God and men.

If you are here today and you know you're a sinner like the rest of us, and you now understand why Jesus went to the altar of a cross on a hill outside the city, to die there for the sins of the world (your sins). Do you realize that at that moment, your debt was paid? God absorbed the cost. He was buried in a tomb, but three days later, He rose again, victorious. If you believe He is alive today, then ask Him to save you. He will! For by grace we are saved through faith, and this not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. Like every gift, fully paid for, it must be received.

So you can say to Him right now in the quietness of your heart – you just pray to Him. He knows the cry of salvation. He heard David's cry and He will hear yours. Just say to Him right now: "Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I believe that my sin is what separates me from You. I believe You love me. That's why You came to die for me, in my place, for my sins, on that cross. When You died, I believe my full payment was made. You were taken down and buried in a tomb. But the grave couldn't hold You. I believe that three days later, You rose again, victorious just as You promised. You conquered sin, death and the grave for me. You are alive. So Lord Jesus, I ask You – please come and live in me. Wash away all of my sins and forgive me. Grant to me that gift of life, purchased on Your altar. Teach me to follow You all of my days. I will thank You for so great a gift."

While we're still in a spirit of prayer, if you prayed that today, I want you to know that Christ heard you. He is coming into your life. He applies that payment. Your sin is forgiven. You are drawn into relationship with God. You have peace with Him. You have fellowship with God. If that's you, I'd love for you to [contact us at Golden Hills Church.] We want to encourage you in this new relationship with God.

For the rest of us, maybe we've known the Lord for a while. Can we say that we are living wholly devoted to Him, like a burnt offering? Can we say we are walking in the light as He is in the light, having fellowship with God? Or are there some things we need to confess or get right? Maybe you just want to thank God. Take a moment to acknowledge to Him that He is your savior and lord, and you want to live for Him, holding nothing back.

Jesus – this is why You came: to establish Your kingdom in the hearts of those who believe. Some day You're coming again. You will take Your seat on David's throne. You will reign in justice and

righteousness forever and ever. God – would You help us to live, not just in this Christmas season, but every season, with the glorious wonder and joy that we are right with God. That we have fellowship with God, peace with God. Because You were willing to die on the altar of the king. Thank You for being our king. Thank You for being our priest. Thank You for being our sacrifice. May You be honored by our worship. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.