

What is the State of Your Conscience

by James Jennings

This sermon delves into four occasions in King David's life where he faced the struggle of maintaining a clear conscience. It emphasizes the importance of seeking counsel, trusting in God's mercy, and being sensitive to the voice of conscience. The narrative explores David's sins and the consequences of his actions, highlighting the need to walk in the light and maintain a good conscience before God and man.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 24:5, 1 Samuel 25:31, 2 Samuel 11:27, 2 Samuel 24:10, Psalms 30:11

Topics: "Conscience", "Seeking God's Mercy"

Description

This sermon delves into four occasions in King David's life where he faced the struggle of maintaining a clear conscience. It emphasizes the importance of seeking counsel, trusting in God's mercy, and being sensitive to the voice of conscience. The narrative explores David's sins and the consequences of his actions, highlighting the need to walk in the light and maintain a good conscience before God and man.

Transcript

So this morning, I want to look at four occasions in the life of King David where he either sinned and defiled his conscience, or he did not sin and kept himself from having pains of conscience. And I just want us to think about the question for our own lives. What is the state of my conscience? What is the state of my conscience? The Bible talks about a defiled conscience.

It says people through former associations with idols, meaning they had false teaching. Their conscience is not informed from the Bible. The Bible talks about some of the weak conscience.

They just have a lot of scruples. They can fall into legalism. They're overly sensitive.

They have a lack of faith. The Bible talks about a strong conscience. The Bible talks about a seared conscience.

And that's kind of the main thing I want to think about. Is your conscience, is my conscience in any way becoming seared, inactive? Is it shutting off? Is it getting silent? Is it rarely accusing me when it should be accusing me? Am I convicted about something yet non-responsive to it? And so, just some of the things that have happened recently just made me think about this question again. What is the state of my conscience for myself? And just for all of us.

That's something we should be asking. Because the Christian life is a lifelong journey of seeking to maintain a clear conscience. So, let's pray.

Father, Lord, we thank You for bringing us here today that we can gather to worship You. Lord, we just want to see Your face. Lord, we want to be pleasing to You.

Lord, we want to honor You. Lord, in everything we do. And so, Father, I just pray You'd meet with us now that You'd help me, Lord, to speak clearly and accurately according to Your Word.

In Jesus' name, Amen. The Welsh evangelist Daniel Rowlands, listen to what he said. In the 1700's, Rowlands said this, You are aware of the mark at which Satan and all his archers aim their shafts.

He's saying all those arrows are aimed at this in the Christian's life. It is at your conscience void of offense in your holy life. That and all the mad and raging fury of earth and hell is leveled.

The devil wants you to not have a good conscience. He doesn't want your conscience to be clear. And when I say conscience, what are we thinking about? The conscience is your dear friend that lives inside of you, you could say, who warns you before you sin, convicts you after you commit sin.

He's not a perfect friend, a perfect guide. He has to be informed from the Scriptures. Like I said, some's consciences are defiled.

The conscience is the voice within that when informed with biblical truth stands in witness against you when you go astray. He's that friend who's the first one to stand up and say, don't go forward. I was thinking about how often people and Tim hit on this a couple of weeks ago, people want accountability partners.

Guess what? Your accountability partner is your conscience. If he's awake, he's going to keep you accountable. He's going to convict you.

If your conscience is informed from the Bible, there's going to be a sense of guilt. One of the most terrifying things that can happen is if we lose our ability to sense guilt and experience conviction. When it comes to accurately sensing guilt or experiencing peace, is my conscience signaling correctly? Because sometimes you feel peace when you shouldn't because the conscience is not informed correctly.

You think you have peace like the false prophets say, peace, peace, when there is no peace. So, Daniel Rowland says this is a war. All the archers aim their shafts.

Is his statement truly biblical? Is there anywhere in the Bible that talks about waging war to keep yourself in the faith and a good conscience? Paul talks about it that way in 1 Timothy 1. And he speaks about two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, who did not wage war to keep the faith and a good conscience and they made shipwreck. So it's accurate to say this is a war from beginning to end. And the reason I want to look at King David, for one, we have a lot of his life recorded.

A lot of people, we do not have so many situations recorded as we do at David. And secondly, in Acts 13, it says David the son of Jesse was a man after God's own heart to do all of my will. So I want to look at David because David is a man whose heart truly was after God.

And he truly wanted to do all of God's will. And yet, we're going to see four situations he encountered, three of which he sinned. He went against his conscience.

And one, he was kept from having pains in his conscience. So first, turn to 1 Samuel 24. We're going to look at David cutting Saul's garment.

David going to kill Nabal. Briefly, we'll look at David and the sin of Bathsheba and Uriah. I don't want to stay there long.

And then the fourth thing we're going to look at is David commanding Joab to do the census. And this is happening throughout his life. Here a man is with a heart after God, wanting to do all of God's will.

And he runs into these different situations throughout his life as he makes it to the end. And one thing I want to focus on too is just the mercy of the Lord. We're going to find in all these situations, God is incredibly merciful to help us to keep a clear conscience and to deal with us when we don't to get us to the end.

And so the mercy of the Lord is something we do not want to forget. This is not a sermon to make you be overly introspective in an imbalanced way. Part of it I want you to see is how merciful God is and how He was towards David.

Another thing to consider in all four of these situations, you're going to see the importance of good counsel. Or in one situation, the lack of anyone giving counsel. And so one of the important things in keeping a clear conscience is good counsel.

So the first thing we want to look at in David's life is 1 Samuel 24, where he cut Saul's garment. And it says, let's read chapter 24, v. 1. Let's start in v. 1. When Saul, who's king right now, returned from following the Philistines, he was told, behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi. Then Saul took 3,000 chosen men out of all Israel.

He went to seek David and his men in front of the wild goat's rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself, or to sleep, many would say that's what he's saying. He's going in to take a nap.

Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand. And you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.

So they're giving counsel here to David. Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Look what happens in v. 5. And afterward, David's heart, or his conscience, struck him.

Because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe, he said to his men, and this is his response. He responds incredibly quick. He said to his men, Wait, the Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my Lord.

The Lord's anointed to put my hand against Him. Seeing He is the Lord's anointed. So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul.

And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way. So let's just read those seven verses. So there we have David.

I mean, he's just going along his life in a very serious trial. Where Saul is trying to kill him. And Saul has been trying to kill him.

And here David is. Saul comes in this cave. Apparently, he's going to rest.

And David's men are counseling him. What to do? David goes, cuts off Saul's garment, part of it, and his conscience. Some versions say it smote him.

It struck him. There was this witness inside of himself convicting him what you did was wrong. Was wrong.

And so, David here shows he's got a very tender conscience. Because we're going to look at what was even sinful about this, but the fact his conscience struck him shows he had a tender conscience. This man's out to kill you.

All of your men, at least most of them, were saying to kill. You should be killing him. Verse 10, Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into My hand in the cave.

Some told Me to kill you. So some of his men are sitting there saying kill. David doesn't kill.

He does something far less. He cuts part of the garment. But even doing that which was less and not what the men counseled, that struck his heart.

That something was wrong. Something wasn't right there. There was this inward striking of the conscience, of the heart, which those heart and conscience are often used interchangeably in the Old Testament.

It's just referring to this inner witness standing against you in what you've done. Now why was cutting the corner of Saul's robe sin? Look at the reason David gives in v. 6. He said to his men, so here David is clearing his conscience. And he says to them, the Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my Lord, Saul.

Why? The Lord's anointed to put My hand out against him. And then he says this. This is the reason why I shouldn't have done this.

Seeing He is the Lord's anointed. He is the Lord's chosen one. Saul is king because God put Saul there.

And God can remove Saul. And God can remove Saul through using the means of David, but the Lord's not commanded David to do that. And here David, not even trying to kill Saul, just cutting the garment, was raising his hand against God's chosen man and God's present design.

And his conscience strikes him that he had gone too far. He was taking matters into his own hands in a way he should not have done and he was not commanded to do by God. God didn't tell him he needed to do that.

God wasn't ordering him to go and cut that garment. And what led to this? Bad counselors. Verse 4, the men said to him, here's the day which the Lord has said.

Okay, so they're actually going and appealing to the Lord saying something. Because that can be pretty convincing. If you say to someone, well, God said He was going to do this and this is what fits the situation.

So his counselors actually are appealing to God. God's encouraging you to do this, David. He said that He would give your enemy into your hand.

And then look at the counselors say at the end of v. 4, you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you. Wait, should David do what seems good to him? What seems good to God? That's the question we should be asking. What does God want me to do? So some were telling David, kill him, as we saw in v. 10.

And then v. 4, some were saying, do what seems good to you. So he's getting counsel. He's getting input from his men.

Did anyone even tell David to cut off part of the garment? I don't know. It doesn't say. Maybe someone said that.

But nonetheless, David does that. His conscience strikes him. And he's convicted.

What he did was wrong. Seeing that Saul is God's chosen man, he should not have raised his hand against him. It's like David is taking Romans 13 really serious about submitting to your governing authorities because they've been appointed by God.

And that's one application you could say. How sensitive is my conscience towards my taxes and things of the government? Or do I try to justify these things because the rulers are wicked and out to kill me? Here David realizes I shouldn't have even raised. I shouldn't have even cut off part of his garment.

I didn't need to do that. Now if he didn't do that, how would he have been delivered from this situation? I don't know. Psalms 1 says, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.

David was surrounded by the counsel of the wicked. Yes, men of Israel. But they were encouraging him to do something that was wrong.

And they were encouraging him by appealing to the Lord. Well, God said there's going to be a day like this. You see, you've been praying for this day, and here God's answered your prayers, and here He's put Saul right here laying down.

This is God's plan. This is God's providence. It was God's providence.

But not with the purpose for Saul to be killed. That's something for God to deal with. And what was David's response? Very encouraging.

Verse 6, his heart struck him, and he didn't just be quiet and kind of go and hide, and say, well, whatever, I'm not going to kill Saul. It doesn't matter what the men do. Look what he does.

Verse 6, he said to his men, the Lord forbid I should do this thing to my Lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against Him, seeing He is the Lord's anointed. Verse 7, now David, he's trying to persuade him, so David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up, left the cave, and went on his way.

So David, he sought to clear his conscience, and not just clear his conscience, he sought to fight to make sure that those men would not do that which he knew was wrong. And you can imagine them arguing with him. This man is trying to kill you and you're letting him go? I mean, this is crazy.

You're being too sensitive, David. You're taking this too far. Daniel 2.21 says God changes times, seasons, He removes kings and He sets up kings.

And God did remove Saul. And God did put David as king. So, this is our first occasion where we see a man after God's own heart wanting to do God's will, and he's being convicted over something that could seem very small and subtle, but he realizes he disregarded God's design who put Saul as king, and he lifted his hand against God's anointed.

God's not told him to do that. He needs to trust the Lord. The Lord will take care of Saul and God does.

And here we have the counsel from this man that led him to go against his conscience in a subtle matter. People counsel you to go against your conscience. And this is all the while David is facing possible death and in a serious trial.

But even there, it matters to keep a good conscience. So turn now, turn over one page. Let's look at the next occasion.

1 Samuel 25. What happened? Well, Nabal. Wicked man who was married to Abigail, it says, who was discerning and beautiful.

Nabal provoked David. No, that's fine. Those phones can get out of hand.

So where are we at? Nabal provoked David by his response. So I don't want to read this whole chapter, but basically if you know the situation, David's men, they're all watching their sheep and their flocks, and in a sense, David's men is helping guard Nabal's flock. He's getting benefits.

And so David goes to him and Nabal's response to his men is just one of disrespect. We're not going to give you anything. No respect for David.

Well, what does David try to do? What does he decide to do? Verse 13, David said to his men, every man, go to prayer and fasting. Is that what he says? No, it doesn't. What does it say? David said to his men, every man, strap on his sword.

Wait, what? Did they seek the Lord here? Let's see. Verse 11. No, it doesn't look like they sought God.

David just compulsively says, strap on swords, men. Let's go kill them. Let's go kill them.

So every man also strapped on his sword. David strapped on his sword. About 400 men went up with David while 200 remained with the baggage.

Now, Abigail gets news that David's coming with his men. She realizes her husband's treatment was absolutely horrible and atrocious. So she's going to go and seek to get David to not do what he is going to do.

And so here we again have counsel. These decisions are happening with people giving input, whether good or bad. So, verse 23, let's read from there.

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey, fell before David on her face, and bowed to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, on me alone, my Lord, be the guilt. Please let Your servant speak in Your ears and hear the word of Your servant.

Let not my Lord regard this worthless fellow... that's an interesting way to speak of your husband, but I guess it's honest. Nabal, for as his name is, so he is. So it's just what his name means.

Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I, Your servant, did not see the young men of my Lord whom You sent. Now then, my Lord, as the Lord lives and as Your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained You from blood guilt and from saving with Your own hand.

So we're going to see later, that's what she discerns. David is about to have blood guilt, killing without a real cause, and trying to save by his own hand. He's not looking to the Lord.

Now then, let Your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my Lord be as Nabal. Verse 27. And then she basically gives a present.

Verse 28, please forgive the trespass of Your servant. Verse 29. Let's go to verse 30.

And when the Lord has done to my Lord according to all the good He has spoken concerning you and appointed you prince over Israel. So she's now thinking, there's going to be a future time you're going to be appointed prince over Israel. Verse 31, she's appealing to David to not have a future blot on his conscience that convicts him.

Verse 31, My Lord shall have no cause of grief or pains of conscience. So don't kill Nabal. Don't kill the others.

You'll save yourself from having a cause of grief or pain of conscience for having shed blood without cause, or for my Lord working salvation Himself. So here he's got counsel. Someone's saying, look, your men, they've strapped on swords.

You're wanting vengeance. My husband who's a worthless man, he treated you horribly. But think about it.

In the midst of all this passion to get vengeance, just stop and think about it. When you become prince over Israel, you're going to have grief on your conscience and pains on your conscience for doing this thing. You don't want to do this.

You do not want to do this. You're going to be working salvation by your own hand. Trust the Lord ultimately.

So, now we're about to find out how he responds. Because getting good counsel is one thing. Hearing it is another.

And obeying it is a third thing. Verse 32, David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent this day to meet me. Blessed be Your discretion.

Blessed be You who have kept me this day from blood guilt and from working salvation with my own hand. For surely it is the Lord, the God of Israel, lives who has restrained me from hurting You unless You had hurried and come to meet me. Truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one man.

In verse 35, he says there at the end, See that I have obeyed Your voice. I have granted Your petition. So David didn't just hear the counsel.

David obeyed the counsel. And he was able to keep a clear conscience at this point by heeding counsel, laying down his passions and desires that were not according to God's will here. He was working salvation by his own hand.

And notice verse 34. Unless you had hurried and come to meet me. Isn't that interesting? Abigail saw something happening.

And she could have waited and it would have been too late. I'm afraid that's often us. We recognize something and we hesitate.

Fear. Am I being too critical? Is this right? And we don't do something about it. We don't hurry and we miss the opportunity and the person sins.

When we should have spoken up. He commends her for her speed in responding. And that kept him from doing something that he would have regretted.

And again, she reasoned by pointing to the future. Now, verse 39, we see the ultimate reason David was kept from defiling his conscience here is the Lord. Verse 39, when David heard that Nabal was dead.

See, God killed Nabal. You've got to trust the Lord. He said, blessed be the Lord whose avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal and the Lord who has kept back His servant from wrongdoing.

The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on His own head. So how many of us, maybe we've rushed in our heart with some feeling of bitterness, something of vengeance, not physically taking a sword to go kill a man. And we have someone there counseling us saying you don't want to do this.

This is sin. You're going to have regrets in the future if you make this quick, hasty decision. You've not even prayed.

You just strapped on the sword and are going forward. Counselors. How important is the people who are giving input in our lives? You don't want to have the counsel of the wicked.

So that's the second. The third example, let's just keep turning over to 2 Samuel 11. I don't want to spend a lot of time here.

For one, this is very well known. David and his sin against Bathsheba and ultimately Uriah. Secondly, just a lot has been shared on this in the last couple of years.

But there's something here that really stood out to me from my father-in-law's sermon on David's great sin. And his point was this. David, the man after God's own heart, David went from being convicted over something that you could say was very minor, cutting off part of Saul's garment.

That could seem very insignificant, very minor. That's a very tender, insensitive conscience to be convicted that you have raised your hand against God's man and you should not have done that. You needed to trust the Lord that He would deliver you in a different way.

David went from that to being so hard. Where not only did he have committed adultery, he sent a letter back in Uriah's hands to put Uriah in a place for him to get killed. How do you go from this extreme to that extreme? I mean, we see that in David's life.

That is terrifying. Because you could go from sensitive to seared. Just like that.

I mean, it's as fast as it takes to sear your own hand. You just go willingly put your hand on that stove and you leave it there in defiance, you can sear that hand quick as you want. Or it can be the slow thing.

You keep burning it, you keep burning it, and it hurts. Eventually, the sensitivity starts to wear off. Or now you can set it down and leave it there.

David here despised the Word of God. And you think about some of the foolishness. Uriah was one of David's mighty men.

And Bathsheba was the granddaughter of one of David's trusted counselors, Ahithophel. I mean, this isn't just some random guy out there who's not in the picture. This is hitting close to home.

David is doing what he did against someone who was so loyal to him. It shows the depths we can fall into in searing our conscience and shutting our conscience up. Where we don't let its voice ring in our ears any longer.

We refuse the conscience as it's telling us, you're guilty, you're guilty, you're doing it. And where was counsel? Two examples so far, there are men given counsel. Where was the counsel with David? Sadly, everyone kept their mouths shut and said nothing.

And it says in verse 14 here, in the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab. We're going to see Joab in this last occasion we're about to look at. He sent a letter to Joab by the hand of Uriah.

And look what's in the letter. Joab's reading this. "...Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him that he may be struck down and die." Joab be involved in us murdering Uriah.

Joab? He did it. He obeyed the king. Even in murder, he was complicit and involved in doing it.

Where's that man's conscience at? Where's his counsel writing back refusing to do that? Where are David's men when they see him inquiring about Bathsheba? Where are they taking a stand for righteousness? Good counsel is absent. All the easier to have the conscience silent when you are not around those who are going to point things out to you and warn you about what you're doing. So, again, the Lord is merciful.

As you know, David, after nine months, the child was born. God sent Nathan the prophet to rebuke him and expose him, and the Lord says, I've put away your sin. Isn't God merciful? God put away his sin.

The Lord is merciful. Now let's go to chapter 24 in 2 Samuel. This is near the end of David's life.

We've got to finish well. We've got to keep a clear conscience to the very end. We've got to maintain it to the very end.

And thank God He's merciful. He helps us. He sends Nathan the prophets.

He sends Abigail. So the fourth occasion, let's look at v. 1. 2 Samuel 24. Again, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

And He incited David against them. And in Chronicles, it says Satan incited. I think the idea is God, like with Job, is giving permission to the devil to incite David to do something.

To go number Israel and Judah. V. 2, so the king said to Joab. So we've got Joab here.

Remember about Joab in 2 Samuel who got this letter and said nothing? He definitely did not have a tender conscience. The king said to Joab, what's his position? The commander of the army who was with

him, go through all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and number the people. That I may know the number of the people.

That's pretty harmless there, isn't it? It seems like it. V. 3, Joab said to the king, may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are. While the eyes of my Lord the king still see it.

But why does my Lord the king delight in this thing? It says in Chronicles, he viewed it as an abomination. What David had told him to do. This is Joab who has a letter about putting your eye up front to die.

And he's just going along with it. And here, Joab is like, this is an abomination numbering the people. What? You're okay with Uriah being murdered? I mean, Joab doesn't go to the other room and think about it and come back and say, well, I thought about it.

This is crazy. He just says it right away. It's that obvious to him.

V. 4, David, you just got counsel. I realize, he got counsel from a man who does not have a good history of giving good counsel. But you just got counsel.

What does David do? The king's word prevailed. Oh, he got his own way. The king's word prevailed against Joab and the commanders of the army.

This was not just Joab. The commanders of the army were against this. Joab was against this.

And David's word prevails. So they go and do this. It takes nine months and 20 days to go and do this census.

Nine months and 20 days. I don't want to read everything here, but we get to v. 9, and Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king in Israel. There were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000.

Let's stop there for a second. So David calls this census to happen. It takes nine months and 20 days to happen.

Joab arrives back with the statistics. He reads those statistics to David. And look what happens in v. 10.

David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, and look how David describes his sin. I have sinned greatly in what I have done, but now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.

And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad. David seers saying, go. And he basically offered three things.

Do you want a famine? Do you want to flee from your foes? Or pestilence? And what did David choose? V. 14, let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercy is great. And so this pestilence comes. V. 15, from Dan to Beersheba.

That's where this census is done. We're going to look in a minute at what is even a census? Why is this offensive to God? But just to get the context real quick. From Dan to Beersheba, 70,000 people died.

70,000. And more could have died. But if you go on here, David, he comes to Gad in v. 18.

He's basically buying a threshing floor, offering a sacrifice. And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

So more could have died than the 70,000. And David pleaded with the Lord and it was averted. God was merciful.

Yet there were consequences for his sin here. And as we saw, v. 10, David's heart, his conscience, struck him after the fact. Now let's think for a moment, what is going on here? All day, maybe yesterday and half of the other day, I'm looking at this thinking, what's so wrong about the census? And not just that.

What is the census? Because you tend to think of a census in American terms, it's just we're going and numbering the population. And maybe there is an age limit. There's got to be a certain age.

From my understanding, it's everyone, no matter if they're two months old, whatever, they want to know the exact amount of people. So why was this so wrong? And it was so wrong that Joab, who doesn't have a tender conscience, right away responds, and all the other commanders, this is an abomination. Don't do this.

This is crazy. Don't do this, David. And obviously they were right because 70,000 people died.

So clearly they were thinking right. They knew there was going to be consequences and guilt for this. And it could have been more than that if David didn't think correctly and pick the right option of the three things there.

What if David would have picked the flee from our foes? More than that could have died. So why, if I'm wanting to have a clear conscience, if I'm wanting to have the mind of God and be sensitive to His voice, and here in David's life, nearing the end, God Himself allows David to be tested with this very thing, what is so offensive and wrong? Now this is one thing people say that I don't think is the reason, but some would actually argue that all these people died because David did not do the census tax. In Exodus, it says when you do a census, each person needs to give a ransom.

If they don't, a plague will come. Okay, a plague happened here. I mean, that was one of three options.

But is Joab just responding in horror that David is wanting to do a census and not get people to pay a tax? And the tax was a very small amount. Whether you were rich or poor, you all paid the same amount. Is this an issue of he didn't get a tax paid? I doubt it.

Was David doing the census with the wrong motive? Well, obviously, motive is part of it. I don't think that's all of it. I think we've got to ask what was he actually motivated to do through the census? This is the question I sought to ask myself.

Why was Joab so upset? Because Joab was there. Joab knows what David was trying to do. So Joab is the place we're going to look to get what I believe is the answer to why this was sinful and what David was actually seeking to do by having this census.

You guys follow that? So let's look at Joab. What was Joab's response? Verse 3, if you got here, we're in 2 Samuel 24. Joab said to the king, so here the king just asked, may know the number of the people.

So he wants to have knowledge of the number of the people. That's what it sounds like David is saying he wants. Verse 3, Joab hears this and what's his response? May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are while the eyes of my Lord and King still see it.

But why does my Lord the King delight in this thing? It's like Joab is sitting there thinking, David's wanting to know how many people he had to find confidence. It seems like some sort of boast. And this is how many people I have.

And Joab might think David's going to be discontent with the number of people he hears and he's saying don't do this. Don't figure out how many you've got. Just let the Lord add to the people.

Don't you try to add to the people. Now here are a couple of takes on this. Some versions render... Lord, I pray You give me clarity on this.

Okay, 1 Chronicles. Listen to this. 1 Chronicles, David did not count those below 20 years of age because the Lord had promised to make Israel as many as the stars of heaven.

Joab the son of Zerui began to count, but did not finish. Yet wrath came upon Israel for this, and the number was not entered in the Chronicles of the King of David. So the Lord promised to make Israel as many as the stars of heaven.

It seems part of David doing this census to know the numbers was not trusting in God's promise to get the people to be a certain amount. And Joab's response is, well, let the Lord do that. And even in your life would that happen.

Or another idea here is this. Some versions render this census was actually going to enlist men into the military. And when Joab gets back, he lists, verse 9, there were 800,000 valiant men.

And so some would say David's motive here that Joab's abhorred at is there's no war ahead of us. And David is basically saying go through all the land, find out all those people who are 15, 16, 17, 18, and they're now 20 or older, and they're part of the military, and let me know how many troops I have. And Joab is abhorred at that thought.

Is David here seeking to enlarge his army by registering more troops? There's no cause for that. Look, whatever it specifically is, Joab is saying there's pride here. You want to know how many people you have.

Whether it's in the military or people as a whole nation, Joab's response is let God add to the people. You don't need to know that number. And may it even happen in your lifetime.

Why does my Lord the King delight in this thing? David was delighting at the end of his life in numbers and outward success and what all he had before his eyes. He was looking at that. It wasn't even his anyways.

It was the Lord's. Anything that had been added, as Joab even says, it was God who had added that. What's amazing here is 1 Chronicles 27 says the number was not entered in the Chronicles of King David.

So this census that happened, and Joab didn't even actually finish all the areas. It says he basically went by two places. Because he knew this was an abomination.

He knew this was a mission that was doomed. Those numbers were not even recorded in the Chronicles of Kings. It's like if David is doing this in order to get a count on the numbers prior to his death, so he can

have that recorded in his biography so to speak, God didn't even let that be recorded.

And Joab tried to prevent David like the 80 men who tried to confront Uzziah, Joab, and the commanders. They tried to prevent David. But he didn't want to have anything to do with that.

And then think about it. David had nine months to change his mind. Nine months and 20 days is how long this took.

And it wasn't until they got back, gave the numbers, that David's conscience struck him that what he did was foolish. You know what? It's sad. There's satisfaction we think we'll get from doing something.

We do it, and what are we filled with? Emptiness. Or the thing you believe will bring you pleasure, what does it bring? Pain. And you regret it.

There's guilt. So like David, we've got to keep watch even on the smallest of things and manifestations of pride to the very end. 70,000 people died.

The very thing that David wanted to take pride in, numbers and quantity, God disciplined specifically there and killed 70,000 and more would have died. It's like your specific thing that you're wanting to put any hope in, God's saying I can take that and strip it down in a moment. You cannot boast in that.

And you can imagine this pestilence that's going through the land. Imagine, say some guy's in a family of 15 people and 14 die. And he's the one man alive.

And imagine he goes to the king. What's going on? Why'd this even happen? Imagine being David and having to give an explanation. Well, you know, I know we're getting ready to get Solomon into power and get this temple going, and I just had this... I wanted to know.

I wanted to know how many people we had. I wanted to add more people to the military. Whatever it was, there's some pride in numbers.

Imagine being that one person. You look at David and think how utterly foolish. That cost the lives of 70,000 people and of my family? Your little lustful, proud desire? That's what sin does.

But God again is merciful. God responded to David's plea. The plague was averted.

David needed an accountability partner. He shut his conscience off. And then Joab came and he shut Joab off.

Then the other commanders came and he shut them off. Look, at the end of the day, we can have all the people in the world telling us this is what you should do, but if we're not determined to obey and love the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him, we're just going to go in the opposite direction. So, a couple things as I close here.

I guess the first is just, and maybe I didn't pull it out as well as I'd hoped, but God's merciful. In all of these situations, you really see God's mercy. This is all in one man's life.

Getting to the end. And a man after God's own heart who wants to do His will. It's a mercy that David for most of his life had a tender conscience, and when he didn't, it's a mercy that God sent men like Nathan the prophet to rebuke him.

Sent women like Abigail to say something to keep him from doing something he would regret. And even a guy like Joab. And the fact that the Lord, even though David didn't hear him, but the Lord is merciful.

Think about the time here. With the sin with Bathsheba, there's a baby that's around nine months. At least, until it comes to the light.

How long with the census? Nine months and 20 days. Even these two periods of at least nine months in David's life where he does not have a clear conscience, God did not abandon his soul to hell. God sought him as a father who disciplines every son whom he receives.

So the Lord is merciful. Getting in the light and having a clear conscience is a very freeing thing. And recently, we know someone shared about that.

And then another occasion, that brother Dennis Jernigan in the documentary, the guy who wrote the song, You Are My All in All, he says when he got into the light and told his wife that he used to be into homosexuality before he was saved, he said, talk about the veil being ripped away between two people. What I thought had been an intimate marriage went into the stratospheres, meaning extremely high from that point on. There's such freedom in having a good conscience of being free, of having something there accusing you that's valid that you suppress.

The second thing we see here is even the godliest believers can make foolish decisions. Look, people use David all the time to justify sin. I realize that.

I realize people in sexual sin will run to David's adultery and they will use that as an excuse. But just because they abuse the text doesn't mean there isn't a sense of comfort at the mercy of God that was shown to a man whose whole life he was not habitually in sin. He had seasons of sin.

His whole life was marked by righteousness. None of those verses in 1 John could pin David to the wall and say you're a liar because you're walking in darkness. That was not characteristic of his life.

There's some comfort here that even David made these mistakes and God was merciful. And that doesn't produce us justifying ourselves when we have something. But it produces a reason to say I don't want to test God's mercy here.

I want to walk in the light right now. A third thing we see here is how important counselors are in the decisions you make. All four of these situations, there was counsel involved or in the one, not given.

Think of that. How many decisions? There's people giving input into your life. I mean, I'm giving input into your life right now.

I'm actually trying to persuade you to walk with a clear conscience. I'm trying to give input. And that's right.

And I hope I'm doing it in a right and balanced way. But who we're around is important. Look, you do not want to walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

And that could be professing Christians who are sitting there telling you to go do something that is not right. And their degree of sensitivity is gone. Their conscience is seared.

They don't feel any sensitivity. We've seen that as a church. We've had the phases of professing Christians wanting to justify profanity.

Professing Christians wanting to justify all sorts of stuff and being a negative influence. A fourth thing we see is we need to trust God. Look, how often we have a pain in our conscience because we didn't trust the Lord.

We cut the garment. Didn't trust God. We went to go get vengeance against Nabal.

We didn't trust God who killed Nabal ten days later. We didn't trust the Lord, that His command to go to war, that custom was the right thing to do. Even though it was a sure victory, David should have went to war.

He shouldn't have been idle. He misused his time. He fell into adultery and murder.

It was just a train wreck. And we saw the counsel with Joab. So counsel is important.

We must trust God. What is your view on sin? Think about it. What is your view on sin? Abigail told David, you're trying to deliver yourself by your own hand.

Do you view that as sin? Anything that does not proceed from faith is a sin. Romans 14 speaks of. There's a reality as Christians that we need to do something because we can do it with a good conscience trusting God.

I'm not condemned as I do this. God wants me to do this. I'm doing it in faith, believing this honors the Lord.

When we do stuff in our own power, we grieve the Holy Spirit. We want to be sensitive to these things. And so, again, remember the verse, Acts 24, 16.

Paul says there, in view of the resurrection of the just and the unjust, in view of judgment day coming, I always take pain to have a clear conscience both before God and man. Paul knew there's a day coming where we're going to give an account for cutting the garment, for numbering the people, for every manifestation of pride. And he says I always, small or big, take pain.

It's not easy. It hurts. It's shameful to have a clear conscience with both God and man.

Not just God, as we heard recently. In Leonard Ravenel's biography, George Verwer said this. This is an example of a man wanting to have a clear conscience and not hurt his communion with the Lord Jesus Christ.

He said, I was at Leonard Ravenel's house for his birthday party and Keith Green came over. We were going to spend an hour in prayer. During that time of prayer, the Lord dealt with me to make something right.

I had been with Keith the other day when one of his music albums was mentioned. I said in passing, yeah, that's a great album. Well, I had listened to some of Keith's music, but I had not listened to that album.

So in comes Keith to the prayer time. I was so convicted that I had not been honest about that little detail that I pulled Keith aside and I said, Keith, I need to repent for what I said to you yesterday. I broke down in tears of repentance because I could not be dishonest even in a subtle little thing when I was with those men.

See, that's an example. A little lie that pricks the conscience. He did not suppress it.

He cleared the conscience. Moved on walking with a good conscience before God and man. People might say, oh, you're being too hard on yourself.

John MacArthur says those who gloss over and accuse conscience in favor of a human counselor's reassurance are playing a deadly game. Ill thoughts and motives may escape the eye of a human counselor, but they will not escape the eye of the conscience. Nor will they escape the eye of an all-knowing God.

When such people are summoned to final judgment, their own conscience will be fully informed of every violation and will step forward as an eternally tormenting witness against them. MacArthur's point, if you didn't get it, is that something's convicting you, you go to a person to try to get counsel, they don't see everything going on. And they might say, I think you're good.

Look, at the end of the day, you've got to walk before God, not just those and the input they give. And the conscience will not clear itself in time. But what will happen in time is the conscience's voice will get quieter, quieter, quieter.

And you won't hear it. You'll be in silence. One last thought.

Just to focus on the mercy of God. The altar David bought from Ornon the Jebusite, as it says in 1 Chronicles, David said, here shall be the house of the Lord. That's where they built the temple.

And David, turn to Psalm 30, Solomon built the temple, but David did a whole lot of preparation. And here's Psalm 30. They saw him at the dedication of the temple.

Well, this all happened shortly after the census. And the very place where that temple was built was where he bought that altar and he pled with the Lord. And the Lord stopped the plague with only 70,000 dying.

And here David writes this psalm at the dedication of the temple. And people rightly say this is sometime after the census. This is fresh on his mind.

Look what he said. This just shows the mercy of God and the seriousness of sin. I will extol You, O Lord, for You have drawn me up.

You have not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cry to You for help and You have healed me. O Lord, You have brought me up from Sheol.

You restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit. Sing praises to the Lord, O You His saints. Give thanks to His holy name.

For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night. And it does when you sin.

But joy comes with the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, and I think he's referring here to the time of the census, I shall never be moved. He had his pride.

That's what he said. By Your favor, O Lord, You made my mountain stand strong. You hid Your face, and I was dismayed.

To You, O Lord, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy. What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it tell of Your faithfulness? Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me. O Lord, be my helper.

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing. You have loosened my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness that my glory may sing Your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

See, the Lord's merciful. You've turned, verse 11, my mourning into dancing. What a thing.

Let's pray. Father, I just pray, Lord, that You who have said in Your Word You will work in us to will, that's to desire, and to work for Your good pleasure. Lord, You'll do that.

Lord, I pray You'd keep doing that. Lord, work in us to will and to work for Your good pleasure. To work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Lord, help us like David to seek Your heart, to keep a good conscience, to be sensitive even in the things that seem so small. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/qdbJ7-XxaCl.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/james-jennings/what-is-the-state-of-your-conscience/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net