

“And I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” // 2 Samuel 24 // *The Life of David* #19¹

Introduction

Well, this weekend is special for a couple of reasons: 1. We got to have all our Summit Collab pastors back and commission our 538th church plant. Brooklyn. 3 baptisms in SE Asia.

The second reason this weekend is special is that this weekend we end our study of David’s life (PAUSE: I was hoping for a *little* more sadness there). Today we bring our series on David to a close, and we end it on one of those passages that most people don’t quite know what to do with.

For a lot of us, the Old Testament as a whole is difficult, and for many it can even be an obstacle to trust in God. Jesus seems like somebody we can jive with--full of love and mercy and forgiveness and tenderness--but the OT God sometimes seems vengeful and spiteful and full of judgment--it’s like God in his middle school years or something. He’s cranky. God before he goes through a PR makeover and re-introduces himself as Jesus.

¹ Works Consulted: Tim Chester, *1 Samuel For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading (God’s Word for You)*, The Good Book Company, September 15, 2014; John Sailhammer. *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Timothy Keller, “[The Hand of the Lord](#),” sermon was preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on August 25, 1996; Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*. And others as noted throughout.

Today’s story is one of those OT stories that makes people feel that way. BUT, I hope to show you, that this story is not only the perfect ending to the story of David, it also shows you that the Jesus who shows up in the pages of the New Testament is the same God we see interacting through Israel in the Old.

I gave this message the title, (pic) “*I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For*” -- inspired by one of the greatest songs on one of the greatest albums of all time.

Some of you know this song because you grew up in the 80s, like me--when music and culture in general were at their pinnacle. Others of you know it because a lion sang it in *Sing 2* a couple years ago. Either way, a lot of us love it.

Bono, the writer of this song, called this a secular, “gospel-based song with a restless spirit.”² If you remember the music video that went along with the song, Bono walks around downtown Las Vegas, singing the song to random strangers--which made me wonder if that’s what Pastor Vance does out there in Las Vegas there, too?

I gave this final message that title because that’s how the author of 1–2 Samuel concludes his 2-volume anthology of David’s life. These stories in 1–2 Samuel, in one sense, have taken us in one, gigantic circle. **Let me show you what I mean:**

² Even though Bono is Irish, he was deeply impacted by gospel music during a previous tour in the United States. So when he started putting together this album, he decided to make the gospel style a key feature. The song originated with a drum beat by Larry Mullen, Jr. Then Bono riffed on it ... but it was the guitarist, The Edge, who pulled a line out of his notebook and handed it to U2 during a jam session. Just one sentence, without much context: “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.” At that point, the song just clicked.

24:1 Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah." (Specifically, "Go count the men we have in the army and find out how strong we are.")

[3] But Joab (the Commander of Israel's armies) said to the king, "May the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are... but why does my lord the king delight (that's a key word I'll come back to) in this thing?" Joab doesn't normally play "good guy" in these stories (Joab is the one, you might recall, taking people in the back alley and stabbing them in the stomach)--but even Joab knows this is wrong. "David," he says, "this is a senseless census." But David wants it, and so he forces it through.

Jump down to vs. [10]: But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done." [11] And when David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, saying, [12] "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the LORD, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.'" [13]... "Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me." (This is like the worst genie experience ever. Choose 1 of these 3 terrible options. And David is like, "Is 'none of the above' an option?" And Gad, speaking on behalf of God, says 'no.')

[14] Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man." 15 So the Lord sent a pestilence (a plague) on Israel

from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba (on that one day!) 70,000 men.

3 questions:

- **Why was this (what David did) a SIN?** (IOW, what was wrong with what David did? I mean, getting a count... Sounds like good organization. Why was this such a sin?) Which leads to the second question:
- **How was what God did (in response) FAIR?** (I mean, God struck down 70,000 people with the plague? How is that fair? All David did was count the people, which looks to most of us like responsible leadership. So, how was this fair? **And, lastly,**
- **Why does the story of David END this way?** Why is this the last chapter in the David saga?

OK, so, here we go...

1. Why was this (i.e. taking the census) a sin?

Again, getting a count--this just seems like responsible management. What was the sin in it--or at least the sin that warranted such a punishment?

I'm going to give you an explanation for why this is wrong³--but I actually want to get on a little soapbox before I do, but I think it needs to be said. It's wrong because God told him not to do it. Full stop. We have this deal in modern society, and it even exists in the church, where we feel like if WE don't see the wrong in something, it can't possibly be wrong.

Tim Keller notes that our society determines what is right and wrong based on two questions: 1. Do I want to do it? And, 2. Does it

³ See commentary by Dale Ralph Davis on 2 Samuel 24 for both of my points. To note, Exodus 30:11-16 says that a census was allowed. David's motivations must be in question.

hurt anybody? And if the answer to the 1st question is “yes, I want to do it,” and the answer to the second is, “No, it doesn’t hurt anybody,” then it can’t possibly be wrong.

- **Is sex outside of marriage OK?** Well, do you want to do it? Yes. Does it hurt anybody? No--it doesn’t seem to. Then go for it!
- **Is it ok for me to leave my spouse for this younger one?** Well, is that what you want? Yes. Is it illegal? Are you really hurting anyone? Not in ways they can’t overcome.
- **Can I marry someone of the same sex?** Well, is that what I want? Yes. Does it hurt anybody? Not that I can see.
- **Do I want to choose a different gender than the one God assigned to me in my body?** Yes. Does it hurt anyone? No, it’s my choice. Then it can’t be wrong.
- But see, at the end of the day, what’s wrong is wrong because God said it is wrong.

Hear me, it’s true that when God declares something wrong, it’s because ultimately it’s harmful for his creation--and often we can see that. But the problem with going through life evaluating moral choices based on whether you think it does or doesn’t hurt somebody is that that assumes God-like knowledge. We can see certain, obvious, physical damages from some actions--we all know stabbing someone is wrong because it leaves someone wailing in pain and a pool of blood on the street. So, stabbing goes in our “wrong” category. But surely we recognize that some of the worst damages caused by our actions are subtle and non-immediate.

- Every parent I know struggles to get their grade school kid to not be on that wretched iPad so much. But the kid thinks, “What’s wrong with what I’m doing? I enjoy this. Watching YouTube videos on the iPad for 11 hours straight isn’t hurting anyone. I don’t feel tired at night when I have the iPad with me, so I don’t need to go to bed.”
- “What’s wrong with only eating Oreos for every meal? They make me happy. (this is me talking now). I feel satisfied. In fact, right after I eat a sleeve full of Oreos, I feel awesome!”

- We parents recognize that there are bigger and more important things happening in our child’s development than the gratification of their immediate needs.
- So the question is, “Who is best to determine what humanity really needs?” Is it us? Or our Creator? To act like we know what is best for ourselves and a society based on our limited knowledge is the **height of pride**.
- **Parents, I know you get that.** *“Listen, Adon: I know it looks like those little slits in the wall are made for a fork. But they’re not. Don’t stick a fork in the electric outlet.” “Why Dad?” Well, son, at the subatomic level, there are tiny particles called electrons jumping between orbits that create an alternating current traveling through this wire that, if it enters your body, can disrupt your central nervous system and burn your skin.”* “Oh, thanks, Dad. Now I see the wisdom. I will heed your command.” This conversation has never happened. One day, he may understand that. But for now I just say “Don’t touch it.” Why? Because I’m your daddy and I love you and at this point, I know more than you.
- Here’s a simple thought experiment: Consider: What is greater, the gap between my 3 year old’s understanding and mine, or my understanding and God’s?
- If you only obey Jesus when he **makes sense to you, then he’s not your Lord, he’s your advisor. Obeying God only when he makes sense to you is not obedience; it’s agreement.** So, that’s the question: Is Jesus your Lord, or is he your advisor? Have you invited God to submit his suggestions to you for consideration, or have you submitted yourself to him because, well, he is *GOD*--and he reigns, and he knows what is best?

OK, that’s the end of my soapbox. (I think I should get a little soapbox up here and stand up on it so you know when I’m doing stuff like this.)

So, it's a sin because God said not to do it. But **are there discernible reasons God regarded this census as a sin?**

- **The problem is in David's motivations.** In and of itself, taking a census was not wrong. In fact, the 4th book of your Bible, is named for a census. It's called "*Numbers*"--Gen, Ex, Lev, *Numbers*. God had commanded Moses to count all the fighting men. So clearly there's nothing inherently wrong with getting a count. The problem, again, is with David's motivations.
- **Did you see how in vs. vs. 3 it said that David "delighted" in this?** Even Joab said, "...and why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" Joab could see this was about David's pride.
- If you're taking notes, write down these 3 things. This census was wrong because it was about:
 - **Pride**—in those days, the size of a King's army was the measure of his stature. It's like, for somebody today, what kind of school they get into; how much money they make; what kind of house they live in; what kinds of circles they run in or who comes to their parties. David is looking for a validation of his value.
 - Second, a king's army was his **Security**—it guaranteed you'd be safe against an attack.
 - Lastly, a big army was **Aggressiveness**—You don't assess your army unless you are thinking about using it. You want to know what you can afford to go and conquer!⁴ (Scholars point out, btw, that this whole chapter, btw, has a violent, oppressive feel to it. **In chapter 20** we find out that David had started to use "forced labor" to take this census-- IOW he'd instituted *slavery*. So, David, God's representative, is enslaving people and now building a big army to go out and conquer. This is militarism with a view toward violence.)

So this was a sin because it represented David (and Israel) replacing God with an army as their source of identity and security, and

because it represented a military build-up with a view toward conquest.

Before we move to our 2nd question, I think this does present a question for us: *What do you delight in?* Where is your identity, security and happiness? What is the 'army' size that you measure to find identity and security?

- I have to be honest--when I read how it was a sin for David to count the army, I wonder what that means for how easily it is for me, as a pastor, to focus on numbers--the size of his church. For a pastor, the size of his church can be identity, security and happiness. **Now, we have good reasons to count**--it can help us plan for the future; to know how big our facilities should be; it can also be a way of praising God for what he's doing here; but sometimes, especially for me, it can be this same sin of David's, because I am delighting in it more than I do God.
 - Jesus had sent his disciples out on a mission trip and they came back stoked at how much power they had over the demons. And Jesus, understanding the temptation of Christian leaders, warned them: "Do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you; rejoice that your names are written down in heaven"--IOW, rejoice that you know God and he knows you.
- So, again: **What do YOU 'delight' in?** What thought about what you have or what you are makes your heart soar just a little? Is it... How you look? How much money you made last year? An award you got? Your SAT scores, or where you got into college? What you see when you look in the mirror? How often you're cited in academic papers by other experts in your field? How many boys pay attention to you?
- **Beware anything** that takes the focus of your identity, security and happiness off of God, because this is wicked in God's eyes.

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *Commentary on 2 Samuel*.

2. How was this fair?

- How was what God did in response to this sin--killing 70,000 people with the plague, fair? There are at least **3 things** in this story that make all this seem unfair--and one of them I haven't even pointed out yet.
- It's in vs 1. Some of you may have noticed this when we read it. Who moved David against Israel? **24:1 Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he (GOD!) incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah."** So God moves David to do something and then blames him for it? See the problem there? If God was the one who moved David to do it, then why would he punish him for it?
- And here's what makes this verse even *more* complicated. In 1 Chronicles, which gives a parallel account of this story, it says, **"Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel." 1 Chronicles 21:1**
- Wait, what? Samuel says "God did it;" the author of Chronicles says that Satan did it. (BTW, contradictions like these are what make skeptics like Bart Ehrman over at UNC say that there is no way the Bible could be the inspired word of God, because how can one author say that God moved David to do something and another say it was Satan and BOTH be speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Wouldn't that be the worst possible contradiction--confusing Satan and God on something?)
- But it's not a contradiction. It's one of the mysteries of sovereignty. The Bible teaches that God sometimes allows us to fall prey to our own evil desires, or the temptations of Satan. God is not the one tempting us or causing us to do it--it's our own

sinful desires doing that. But God is sovereign over it, in that he allowed the temptation to happen, because he intends to use our disobedience as a part of *his* plan.⁵ God is sovereign, but we are still responsible.

- My friend **David Platt** tells the story of trying to go somewhere to preach when he got stuck in the ATL airport--that horrible place where all my dreams go to die (I'm pretty sure, btw, when someone dies here in Raleigh, if you go to heaven it's a direct flight; if you go the other direction you'll route through ATL)--Anyway, David got stuck, there because Delta lost track of one of their planes. David said, I'm not sure how you lose track of something as big as an airliner. I've misplaced my keys a few times. I even lost my truck once in a parking lot and spent an hour looking for it. But I am proud to say that I've never misplaced a 747." So, David called me at this event we were both speaking at (that's where I intersect into this story) and he said, 'Man, I can't get there. You've got to preach,' and so I pulled together a message--and, here's the thing: God really used it... I mean, people got saved. Rededicated. Slain in the Spirit. Somebody got raised from the dead. Maybe not all that, but it was clearly a God-ordained night. And David says, "It's clear God wanted you to preach that night, and that he was somehow in the mysteriously missing airliner. God was sovereign, but I still spent a few hours on the phone with DELTA holding them responsible."
- God is sovereign, but DELTA is responsible.

That all make sense?

secondary causes and properly attributing them to the exact cause. Under the divine providence everything ultimately was attributed to him; why not say he did it in the first place?"

⁵ Walter Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, "It is also true, according to the Hebrew thinking, that whatever God permits he commits. By allowing census-taking, God is viewed as having brought about the act. The Hebrews were not very concerned with determining

The harder aspects of the question of “is it fair?” is that it (a) seems like others are being punished for David’s sin, and (b) the punishment seems to far exceed the crime.

A few things here: First, the text indicates that Israel was not, in fact, innocent. Did you see how vs. 1 opened? **24:1 Again the anger of the LORD was kindled *against Israel*, and he incited David against them...**”

- **Who was God angry at? Israel.** What was going on in David’s heart was going on in all of their hearts. David’s sin might be the occasion of the punishment, but they were all participants in some way.
 - **HANG WITH ME--THIS IS DEEP. Sometimes, when we see something bad happen to what looks like an innocent person,** we say that God is unjust. And it’s true, sometimes the punishment doesn’t seem to fit the crime. But in another sense, the Bible makes clear that the whole human race is under the condemnation of death because of a rebellion against God we all participated in. All of us, as the human race, have chosen to walk away from God and go our own way. So, there’s no one who can truly point their finger at God and say, “This is unfair.”
 - **And this is not just an Old Testament thing, either. Even Jesus taught this.** There was this situation in Luke 13 where a tower fell on a group of 18 Israelites and killed them. And Jesus said, “Do you suppose that these Israelites were just more wicked than everyone else?” As in, God saw them all standing in one place at one time and thought, ‘Now I’ve got them!’ and toppled the tower over on them? “No,” Jesus says, “but unless you repent, you will *all* likewise perish.” In other words, “You are guilty of the same kinds of sin that those 18 people were,

and unless you turn from your sin, we will all eventually suffer the same fate as they did. Jesus said, “The question is not, ‘Why did this tower fall on those 18, but why did it fall on *only* those 18’? The more accurate question, according to Jesus, is not why do bad things happen to good people, but why does God hold off bringing justice to bad people? Why do good things keep happening to bad people?”

- So, in one sense, **the 70,000 Israelites who died** were not innocent.
- **But you say,** “*Yeah, but surely not every single one of those 70K was equally guilty of the pride, idolatry, and militarism David was delighting in. I mean, there were probably kids in that group of 70,000.*” A couple of things here:
 - **First, our sins have consequences for those around us.** They may not be guilty of them, but they are affected by them. If the dad abuses alcohol, the child is not guilty of that sin, but he does suffer for it. *The Bible teaches over and over that the sins of the leader affect the people.*
 - You say, “But these 70K people didn’t just experience some negative effects, they died. That’s so ultimate, and final.” **And listen, I know this is hard to understand**--but in the Bible’s perspective, physical death is not ultimate in terms of judgment. **Not even close.**
 - **Think about it: every person in these stories, including Samuel and David, is dead now.** Everyone dies. From an eternal perspective, physical death is not the ultimate judgment; what happens *after* that is ultimate.
 - **Physical life and death aren’t ultimate; eternal life and death are,** and what the innocent of those 70K experienced their first 5 minutes in eternity more than

made up for any pain or inconvenience they experienced on earth.

- **So, you've got to have an eternal perspective about this stuff.** God collected these 70,000 people early to teach Israel an important lesson about pride and idolatry. As Tim Keller says, he collects a few people early for the sake of many people's eternities, and that's hardly immoral.
- **And that's the last part of our answer:** God used all this for good, like he promises to do ultimately with all things for those whom he loves.
- As I said, **the children of Israel were becoming violent and aggressive; oppressive.** So, God collected a few of them early to make a point--i.e. to keep Israel from becoming more wicked. God collects a few people early for the sake of many people's eternities, and that's hardly immoral.⁶

And that brings us to the last question...

3. Why end the book with this story?

It felt like we ended David's story last time in chapters 22-23. We read his last words, and that seemed like an ideal place to end his story. So why this little coda?

Here's why: **this story drives home the central point that the author of 1 and 2 Samuel has been trying to make for 55 chapters.**

It shows us, first:

⁶ For the last part of this point, I have leaned on Tim Keller whose explanation on this event and those like it I have found helpful.

A. David is not the King we are looking for

- 2 Samuel ends with 70,000 Israelites dying because of the sin of their King. And the author is asking, "Is this the King Israel is looking for?"
- **OT scholar John Sailhamer points out** that 1–2 Samuel goes in a gigantic circle.
 - 1 Samuel opens up with Hannah in the Temple crying out for justice; I'm about to show you that 2 Samuel ends with David in a new Temple, crying out for salvation. Both of them expressed that with songs that talked about God as their *rock*.
 - 1 Samuel opened with Israel wanting a king to replace God as their identity, security and happiness; it ends with that very king looking to his army, instead of God, for that I, S, and H.
 - David has been a great King, but he is not the King they are looking for. And he started out so well. He was virtuous, courageous, and patient. And even he failed us.

B. A Son of David will be the King we are looking for

Let's go back to the text one more time...

16 And when the angel (who was administering the plague) stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it (he comes right up to Jerusalem, David's capital city), the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. (That's a random detail, right? Who is this 'Araunah' cat and why does he matter?)

17 Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people (the parallel account in Chronicles says David

saw the angel with a literal sword stretched back to smite Jerusalem), and said (David said again), "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house."

David says, "Don't punish these people for this sin--either their's or mine. They are just sheep. Smite me, the shepherd." And God accepts the bargain.

Except. Except, he doesn't kill David like David had asked. Instead, **vs. 18**, God asks David to build an altar at the point where the angel stayed his hand, and there to make a sacrifice.

So David does that--buys this threshing floor, where he'd seen the angel stay his hand from bringing the plague into Jerusalem, and there he offers a sacrifice--and this is where the story really gets good.

You see, 2 Chronicles 3:1 (the parallel account) tells us that that threshing floor was on the top of Mt Moriah, which is the very place where Abraham had attempted the sacrifice of Isaac, and God sent an angel to stop him from doing so. Abraham stood there above his son, poised with a knife, ready to offer his son as sacrifice when God, through the angel, tells him to stop. And then the angel pointed over to a thicket where a ram was caught by the horns, and says, "Offer that ram as a sacrifice instead!"

And now here we are, **a thousand years later**, on that very spot where God had stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, and now God stops his angel from killing God's national son: David and his

family in Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 3:1 says the knife of judgment was raised, just like it had been with Abraham over Isaac, when God tells the angel: "Stop. Stay your hand. I'll provide a sacrifice."

That threshing floor that David bought will also be the very place where Solomon will build the Temple, which is where Israel will offer sacrifices for sin, sacrifices that will point forward to another Lamb who was coming who would die once for all for the sins of the people.

And so, approximately 1000 years after this moment in 2 Sam 24--1000 years between Abraham and David; and another 1000 years between David and Jesus--Jesus, the Lamb of God, would be lifted up on a cross on top of a mountain... but no one showed up to tell God to stay his hand. The knife of judgment slashed into him, because he was bearing in his own body the punishment for our sins.

Jesus was the Lamb that God had pointed Abraham to in the bushes who would replace Isaac; he was the sacrifice pictured in those Temple sacrifices that allowed God to stay his hand against Israel in this plague.

He's the Lamb who was wounded for our sins and whose blood covers us, if we receive it, so that God can stay his hand of judgment against us. As Peter said, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live unto righteousness. For by his wounds you have been healed." Because on that cross God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

No, David is not the King we are looking for.

Jesus is.

David's reign ends with 70,000 Israelites dying for his sin. Jesus will begin his reign by dying for ours. In David, the innocent are punished; in Jesus, the guilty go free. Jesus is the King we are looking for. He succeeds for you where David, and every other human leader, and father, fails you. Some of you have been so disappointed by people in your past--your dad, a teacher, an older brother. You trusted them, and they took advantage of you and abused you. Jesus is the Rock, the big Brother, everlasting Father, the Mighty God, the strong Arm, the strong tower, the refuge--the KING, that you've been always looking for. And it may have taken you a lot of bitter disappointments to figure it out--but that's always been the point, to show you that Jesus is the one you've been search for, and all that you're looking for is in him. The arms you sought in romance where found in his arms; the identity you sought in your father's approval is found in him; the security you looked for in family is found in being called his son or daughter.

(VAMP)

And that leads, lastly, to...

C. Our response ought to be worship

Are you ready for the final words of 2 Samuel? *Stand up!* You've gotta stand up for this.

David goes to the guy who owns the field he wants to buy, the place where he saw the angel pull back the sword. And when Araunah hears what David wants to do with his property, he says, 'No, no, my King. You don't need to buy it. You can have it. It's my gift to you.'

24 But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. For I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

David could have said, "Well, thank you for your donation. That makes this easy. God gets his altar and it doesn't cost me anything." But instead, David said, "I have to do something that expresses my gratitude to God." You see, when you've really experienced God's grace, you have to do something to express it. Not just with your lips in song, but with your life in service.

- **That expression may be financial.** Like the woman with the incredibly expensive alabaster flask of ointment who breaks it over Jesus' feet, you want to give Jesus something by which you say, "Jesus, you are worthy of my very best. Without you I'd be lost; I'd be nothing. And I've just to do something that pours out my love and my gratitude to say thank you."
- It might be **something you do with your life**--we have people who leave great jobs, or great prospects for jobs, to live overseas to bring the gospel to those who have never heard. And they do it because that's who Jesus cares about and they just want to say thank you.
- **Maybe you'll give your life to serving some community around here**--the prisoners; the orphan; the unwed mother or high school dropout.

- Or **maybe for Jesus' sake** you'll just forgive a friend or give your spouse another chance. **Not because they are worthy of it, but because he is.**

Whatever it is, when you grasp the grace of God, like David did, the rest of your life will be spent saying, *"Lamb of God, you are worthy. Worthy of my best, worthy of my all. And were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."*

In seminary I was inspired by the story of 2 Moravian missionaries early in American history--John Leonard Dober and David Nitschmann--who became burdened to reach the inhabitants of a nearby island, now known as St. Thomas, with the gospel, most of whom were slaves on a plantation system down there. But the plantation owners feared the gospel and its results, and would not even allow the missionaries to talk with the slaves. They would allow only other slaves to talk with slaves. So the missionaries sold themselves into slavery in order to take the gospel to the islanders. Working in bondage in the harsh conditions of a tropical climate, they reached many of them with the good news.

The story goes that after these men sold themselves into slavery, they were put into shackles and loaded onto the boat as cargo. And as the boat pulled away from the shore, John Dober lifted his hand up to heaven and said, "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering."

Inspiring story, right? That's not the actual story, though. It's one of those legends that grows up and gets exaggerated as it is repeated. It is true that these 2 young men were burdened for these slaves, resolved to sell themselves into slavery if necessary, but they didn't need to. They boarded a ship (as free men) on

October 8, 1732 and spent two years among the people of St. Thomas. Few others joined them; other religious denominations were very opposed to the work, saying it was too dangerous and a waste of resources. In J.E. Hutton's *History of the Moravian Church*, he records, *"For fifty years they labored in the West Indies without any aid from any other religious denomination. They established churches in St. Thomas, in St. Croix, in St. John's, in Jamaica, in Antigua, in Barbados, and in St. Kitts. They had 13,000 baptized converts before a missionary from any other Church arrived on the scene."*

Honestly, I think the true version might be more inspiring than the exaggerated one. You see, it's one thing to be ready, in one dramatic gesture, to sell yourself into slavery. But to get up every day and face the difficulties of ministry in that kind of context--with no support and seeing no fruit--that takes a resolve and dedication that goes down iron your bones. These men had not a moment, but a lifetime in which they said, "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering. . ."⁷

If you've understood the grace of God toward you, that's what you'll want to do.

Do you want to do that now? Our worship teams are coming. Let's sing...

⁷ J. E. Hutton's *History of the Moravian Church*, ch. 6