

As we come to the next to the last lesson of our 9 week OT series on King David, we have a little bit of a cliff hanger. This is David and Bathsheba, part 2.

Last week, David did a bad, bad thing. Actually, he did several bad, bad things. During the time of year when kings go out to battle, King David stayed home. While he was kicking back on his terrace, he was peeping on a neighbor woman who was bathing. Even after he learned that she was married to one of his soldiers, he summoned her to his palace, and there he slept with her, and then sent her home.

If you think Bathsheba was some sort of seductress enticing David, she wasn't. If you think she was an equal partner in some sort of romantic affair, she wasn't that either. He was king. He summoned her. He took her. And he sent her home. In fact, the very first thing she says is, "I'm pregnant." This is far closer to rape than it is to romance.

It's at this point David begins a cover up. He summons the soldier home. But he has too much honor to sleep with his wife while his comrades are still in the field. So David sends orders to have him killed, and make it look like an accident. And he tells his general, "Do not let this matter trouble you." Literally he says "Do not let this matter appear evil in your eyes."

Which brings us to our lesson which begins at the end of 2Samuel ch11. When we left David last week, it seems that he got away with it. He's King, and he answers to no one. In today's parlance, there is "no controlling legal authority." It seems that David gets off scot free. He has seemingly gotten away with murder. And he has no twinge of conscience. "Don't let this matter appear evil in your eyes."

Which brings us to our OT less for this morning. At the end of ch11, Bathsheba does only the second thing she does in this story. The first thing she did was to tell David she was pregnant. The second, v26, is to mourn, to make lamentation for dead husband. This is no seductress. This is not a woman having a romantic affair. Instead, she is a woman who has been subject to the will and whims and lusts of the king.

And once again, David commands. v27 "David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son." David has gotten everything he wanted, regardless of who has to pay the price.

But then we find a little tiny line tacked on the end of v27. It's a small line. But it's a crucial line. "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." Literally, it says, David's actions were "evil in the sight of the Lord."

David has rationalized so that it is not evil in his own eyes. But scripture tells us, it is evil in God's eyes. And so, ch12, v1, God sends the prophet Nathan. There's a delicious irony. In ch11, David sent over and over again. He sent for word asking who Bathsheba was. He sent for her to sleep with her. He sent for her husband to try to convince him to sleep with her. He sent word to his general to have her husband killed.

But now God sends. God sends his prophet Nathan. Now it may not be readily apparent, but part of the job description of the prophets in Israel was to provide checks and balances on the king. There was no separation of church and state. It was the prophet's job and vocation to support the king when he was acting in accordance with God's will, and to oppose the king when he was acting against God's will.

So God sends the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan tells David a story. Nathan brings David what seems to be a standard judicial case for him to judge. end of v1 "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor." v2 "The rich man had very many flocks and herds; 3 but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought." And listen to this poignant description in v3: "He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him." This lamb is not livestock. This lamb is a family pet.

v4 "Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." The rich man doesn't slaughter one of his many lambs. He takes the pet lamb, the only lamb, of the poor man.

And this makes David mad. David is outraged. Literally, his "face is ablaze with fury." He says, v5 "The man who has done this deserves to die." That's not a judicial sentence according to the law. That's simply David's gut-feeling. This guy doesn't deserve to live. The legal sentence, which follows Mosaic law, comes in v6: The rich man needs to give the poor man 4 lambs in return.

David has fallen into Nathan's trap hook, line, and sinker. So, Nathan springs it. David is angry with the rich man who behaved so abominably. So v7, Nathan says "You are the man." You are the man. You're the one who has done this horrible thing. David goes in an instant from judging to being judged. David finds out that the sin in question was not someone else's. Instead, the sin is his own.

And then Nathan give David God's message with both barrels:

v7 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel:

'I anointed you king over Israel

I rescued you from Saul;

I gave you his house and his concubines,

I gave you the people of Israel and of Judah."

And then God makes the incredible statement, end of v8, "And if that had been too little, I would have added as much more." I gave you all these things. If that wasn't enough, I would have given you more. But you didn't wait for me. You got greedy. You took matters into your own hand. You took, instead of asking me to give. I gave you all this, and you weren't satisfied. You had to have more. And you took and you raped, you betrayed and you killed.

Because of that, you're going to have trouble for the rest of your days. In v10 and 11, God lays out the kinds of trouble David is going to have within his own household. 'You did this

to other people? Well your family members are going to follow your lead.' Like father, like sons, and you're not going to like it. And while you did your dirty deeds in secret, your sons will do it in public. There will be grave consequences for your family.' (But we'll save that part of the saga for next week.)

God lays it out for David, and it's a harsh message.

But here's where you have to give David credit. Here is where his deep relationship with God pays off. David could have called in John Dean and Charles Colson and tried to cover things up even further. David could have gotten into a discussion about what the meaning of "is" is. But he doesn't.

When confronted with his own sinfulness, David admits it, v13, "I have sinned against the LORD." By David's own admission, the man who did this thing deserved to die. And David, when confronted, confesses his guilt.

In fact, we see the depth of his repentance elsewhere in scripture, in Psalm 51. We read a part of that psalm today. It says that it was written by David after the prophet Nathan came to him.

The first two verses clearly reflect an attitude of repentance:

"1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;  
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.  
2 Wash me through and through from my wickedness  
and cleanse me from my sin."

vv3 and 4 are a clear admission of guilt.

"3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
4 Against you only have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight."

David has said to his general and to himself, "do not let this appear evil in your sight." Now he says to God, "this was evil in your sight."

And then he asks for the forgiveness only God can bring:

"8 Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure;  
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed."

He asks for the renewal that God can bring:

"11 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me."

And then, for a man who has had a close relationship with God all of his life, he asks the bottom line thing for him, that that relationship can continue, that God's Spirit will still be present with him.

"12 Cast me not away from your presence  
and take not your holy Spirit from me.  
13 Give me the joy of your saving help again  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit."

And we're told in 2Samuel, David does find forgiveness. That doesn't mean there weren't dire consequences. The repercussions of his sin had a ripple effect for the rest of his reign. His sons have watched their father and they will act like him. Several sons will eventually die. And for the rest of his life, David will have to spend enormous amounts of energy trying to clean up the mess he had made. But he asks God for forgiveness, and he receives it.

Now, I suspect given the statistics, that none of us will be guilty of murder or rape. Some of us may be guilty of infidelity. Most of us will be probably be guilty of grasping and trying to seize things for ourselves, instead of waiting for God to give them to us. And all of us will be guilty of trying to do things our way rather than God's way.

And when, not if, when we mess up we can seek God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness is free. But it does require something of us.

It may require us to listen to those Nathans in our lives who are willing to confront us. It usually requires us to put away our self deception and rationalization. And it always requires us to admit, like David, "I have sinned against the Lord." And we can hear, like David, "The Lord has put away your sin."

For with God, there is forgiveness.

In Nathan's parable, Nathan compared David to a rich man who seized and killed the lamb of the poor man. That lamb was beloved, like a daughter to him.

Yet God willingly gave his own beloved son, the Lamb of God, to be sacrificed for all of us. He took our guilt. He took the penalty for all our sins. And he offers us forgiveness and cleansing.

Forgiveness awaits us, if we turn to God and seek it.

May God sustain us with his bountiful and forgiving Spirit.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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