



David and Bathsheba

2 Samuel 11-12

Introduction

David had many victories in life. As a young shepherd boy he defeated a lion and a bear. In his teens, he defeated Goliath. In his 20s he overcame Saul's efforts to kill him. As a king he defeated the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians, the Ammonites and many more foes.

Yet, after all these victories, David suffered his greatest and most costly defeat when he fell to the enemy within. The seeds for his moral failure had already been planted in previous years as David multiplied wives and concubines (5:13) in disobedience to God's word.

Now, however, in one unguarded moment, he crossed a moral line that would impact his family and his kingship for the rest of his days.

David's sin with Bathsheba: 11:1-5

"Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem" (11:1).

In David's day, kings went out to war in the spring because the weather was conducive to the movement of armies, including heavy animals and supply wagons. If the army had chariots, it was all the more imperative to have firm ground to travel on.

On this particular spring, David sent his army out to resume the campaign against the Ammonites (ch.10). David, however, chose to stay at home while his army went out to war. Thus, while all his men were occupied with work, he was idle. He had too much time on his hands. Further, he was isolated from those who typically held him accountable for his actions.

"Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance" (11:2).

Note that David arose from his bed "when evening came." The impression given is that he was lounging around doing basically nothing all day. When other men were going to bed after a long day's work, David was just getting up.

Something is wrong with this picture. He seems to be living an undisciplined and lazy life. In David's case, the saying was true: Idleness is the devil's workshop (Proverbs 16:27 – The Living Bible).

Taking a casual evening stroll on the rooftop of his palace, he saw Bathsheba bathing. There is no indication that she was being indiscreet. This issue was that David's elevated view allowed him to see more than he needed to see in the courtyards of the neighboring homes.

Concerning temptation, Martin Luther said: ***"You can't keep the birds from flying over your head; but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair."***

Temptation will, inevitably, come to us in many ways. The issue is: Are we ready to defend against it when it comes? Or, like David, are we already so compromised in our behavior that we are a sitting duck for temptation?

None of us should naively suppose that we will never fall. What areas of temptation are you most susceptible to?

So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (11:3).

Uriah was not just one of David's warriors; he was one of David's 30 "mighty men" (2Samuel 23:39). The simple fact that Bathsheba was married should have been enough to stop David. The further fact that she was married to one of his most valiant, trusted warriors should have been a further incentive to stop.

David's moral compass (sexual lust) was so compromised, however, that nothing would stop him from taking this woman.

"David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant" (11:4,5).

Never was the saying truer: "Your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). But instead of confessing his sin and halting the downward spiral, David went a step further and tried to cover up his sin.

The attempted cover-up: 11:6-13

David called Uriah home from the battlefield, hoping that he would sleep with his wife. In this way, the pregnancy of Bathsheba could be ascribed to Uriah, and David might evade guilt. Though David tried to get Uriah to go to his home (on two successive nights), Uriah would not be unfaithful to his God, his commander, or his army.

Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing" (11:11).

Uriah's uprightness stands in stark contrast to David's folly. It is instructive to see that David could be the example of godliness in one season of life, and then the example of self-centered, sinful behavior in another season.

A death-sentence for Uriah: 11:14-25

David was not moved by Uriah's upright character. He could have, at this point, confessed his sin and accepted the consequences. Instead, David sinned even further. He sent Uriah back to the battlefield with his own sealed death sentence in hand. Joab was instructed to place Uriah in a vulnerable spot in the battle and then to withdraw from him. Joab did so and, as David hoped, Uriah was killed in battle. Once David received the news that Uriah was dead, he moved forward with his cover up his sin.

Sin usually spills over and impacts many lives. David involved many people in his sinful behavior: the servant, Bathsheba, Uriah and Joab. When lust has consumed us, our tunnel vision for what we want prevents us from seeing the wider impact that our choices will have on other people.

David marries Bathsheba: 11:26-27

After Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband, David took her as a wife. It seemed to him that he had successfully covered up his sin. Perhaps he had, to the eyes of men; but the eyes of God see even our best-concealed secrets.

"But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord" (11:27).

Nathan the prophet confronts David: 12:1-12

Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer were the two spiritual advisors to David. These men were given direct revelations from God pertaining to the life and work of David. In this case, Nathan was given specific insight into David's sin. Thus, he came to David with a 'case' concerning two men and a lamb.

A rich man had many flocks, while a poor man had one lamb that he loved dearly, "like a daughter." When a visitor came to the rich man, he took the poor man's beloved lamb and killed it to feed his guest. David was enraged when he heard this story. He demanded justice.

Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion" (12:5,6).

Then Nathan lowered the boom on David's heart: Nathan then said to David, **"You are the man!"** (12:7). God had made David like the rich man in the story. Yet, David had stolen the one treasure of the poor man (Uriah) by taking Bathsheba from him.

When trying to communicate something very important to another person (a problem, a personal issue, a blind spot, a truth that is hard to accept) it is good to use analogies or stories that the other person can relate to.

This is why Jesus used "parables" (comparisons) to explain spiritual ideas. This is why Nathan used a story that David could relate to – involving sheep.

The judgment upon David's house was severe:

"Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun'" (12:10-12).

- Conflict and death among David's household members.
- Opposition against David from within his own household.
- David's wives given to another man (usurping his kingship).
- Public humiliation before all of Israel.

The devastation and relational pain that would follow in David's house was the greatest ongoing defeat in his life. He would experience the pain arising from this sin all the way to his final breath. The fact that the knowledge of David's sin went beyond "all Israel" is evident in that his sin was recorded in Scripture for people in every generation to read and learn from.

While God offers to us forgiveness from the guilt of even our greatest sin, this does not mean that all consequences arising from our sin will disappear. We may have to live with serious consequences for the rest of our lives. Yet, God can help us to live for His glory even in the midst of the chaos and wreckage that our sin has brought about.

David's repentance: 12:13-15

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." So Nathan went to his house (12:13-15).

David did not deny, minimize or excuse his sin. He owned it, acknowledging that not only had he sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba; but he had also sinned against his God who had so richly blessed him with the very power and position he had abused. He wrote psalms of confession on this occasion (see notes at end of this section).

The death of the child: 12:15-23

Bathsheba's baby was born with a severe illness. David fasted for 7 days, thinking that perhaps God might have mercy and spare the child. When the child died on day 7, he ended his fast.

"David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate" (12:20).

His servants were puzzled as to why David stopped fasting when the child died. When they asked, he answered with words that have given assurance to millions who have lost little ones early in life:

"While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (12:22,23).

David knew that he would someday go to be with the child in the presence of God. From this passage we gain the assurance that children who die are taken immediately into the presence of the Lord. There is no indication of a clear "age of accountability" after which children must make their own volitional choice to love God. We must trust in God's mercy and wisdom to deal with every individual in line with His perfect and complete knowledge of their situation in life and their ability to make an informed decision concerning Him.

Solomon born to David and Bathsheba: 12:24-25

“Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the Lord loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the Lord’s sake” (12:24,25).

The name “Solomon” is related to the Hebrew term “Shalom” – Peace. The name “Jedidiah,” however, means “beloved of the Lord.” It is significant that this child, born of such a sin-infested union between David and Bathsheba, should be “loved by the Lord.” It is even more astonishing to human sensibilities that the Lord would choose this child to carry on the Davidic kingship and that Solomon would inherit the privilege of building a house for the Lord.

There’s a reason it’s called AMAZING grace. In the New Testament, a murderous Christ-hater became the example of God’s mercy and grace (the apostle Paul, see 1Timothy 1:12-16).

In the Old Testament, there is no greater example of God’s amazing grace than David. Not only was he forgiven and restored after his great sins; but God chose a child arising from this sinful union to carry on His promise to bring a Savior into the world.

Notice how Bathsheba, “the wife of Uriah,” appears on the first page of the New Testament, in the genealogy of Jesus – Matthew 1:6! There is NO sin that is a match for God’s AMAZING grace.

David’s confessional psalms: Ps. 32 & 51

David wrote many “confessional psalms” (6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Two in particular were written at the time of his repentance over his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah (Ps. 32 and 51). Psalm 32 has become a paradigm for how we should (and should not) deal with the sin that accumulates in our lives.

The blessing of a forgiving God: (1-2) *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!*

To be a forgiven sinner is liberating. To have the weight and shame of guilt lifted is a blessing beyond comparison. To stop hiding in deceit, and to ‘come clean’ feels wonderful.

The folly of trying to hide our sin: (3-4) *When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.*

To hide sin (as if we can “hide” anything from God) and fail to acknowledge it to God brings a heaviness that is unbearable. The weight of God’s convicting Spirit remains heavy when sin is left un-confessed. Our very life vitality feels like it is draining away.

Confession brings forgiveness: (5) *I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; and You forgave the guilt of my sin.*

We make forgiveness so complicated. I need to do penance. I need to earn forgiveness. I need to do more good than I did bad. No! God simply asks us to acknowledge our sin, and then He will remove our guilt immediately (see 1 John 1:9).

Forgiveness is a gift, not a reward. God wants a broken and contrite heart (see Ps.51:17). In fact, the Greek word for “confession” in the New Testament means: **“To agree with.”** When we confess, we are agreeing with God concerning the guilt of our sin.

The admonition to seek Him: (6-7) *Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance.*

Having experienced the freedom of forgiveness, David admonishes others to seek God in times of failure and brokenness. The flood of great waters (shame, trials, consequences) will not be able to overwhelm the one who takes refuge in the arms of a loving, restoring God.

God’s response: (8-9) *I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you.*

God promises to teach the repentant sinner. We must not, however, be “stubborn as a mule” to God’s corrections. We need to submit to His loving discipline and guidance.

The goodness of walking with God: (10-11) *Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.*

David concludes by reminding us of how much better it is to do life with God than apart from God. A life of wickedness is beset with sorrows. A life that is upright is surrounded by the faithful love (lovingkindness) of the Lord.