

You are that man

2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15

“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army.” So begins the eleventh chapter of the book of 2 Samuel. David, king of Israel, has decided to linger in Jerusalem instead of leading his army into battle. At that time, it was the custom of kings to accompany their troops into battle. You will recall an earlier story when King Saul was at the battle with his army and young David slew the enemy’s champion, Goliath.

David finds himself in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong thought processes and a terrible parade of poor choices ensues. Walking on the palace roof, David spies a beautiful woman and deems to have her. It made little difference to him that she belonged to another man. As king of the kingdom, wasn’t everything, and everyone, at his disposal? The resulting pregnancy would implicate David and so he tried to have the woman’s husband return home to make it look like the child was conceived in an honorable manner. David’s charade fails when the valiant and dedicated soldier refuses to return home while his comrades are still engaged in fighting the enemies of Israel. In an attempt to hide his guilt and shame, David gives orders that the man should be placed at the front of the fighting where he will surely be killed. That plan works.

On to Plan B, David calls the woman to the palace and makes her his wife. However, while David may have been able to pull the wool over his subjects' eyes concerning his dalliance and the murder of his competition, God sees everything and was very unhappy with David.

Enter Nathan. Nathan was an old and trusted friend of David, now charged with delivering a very difficult message. Knowing that David had already dispatched one inconvenient member of his court, Nathan knew he must approach the king in a manner that would not put his own life in danger. With his knowledge of David's passion for justice, Nathan shares a parable about a rich man and a poor man.

There is some debate about who each of the characters represent in this story. Is the ewe lamb Bathsheba or her husband, Uriah, who in fact is killed? Who is the visitor to the rich man? Is it the devil himself, tempting David to sin? In any event, Nathan's story stirs David's righteous anger causing him to declare that the poor man be repaid four-fold for what was taken, and the rich man be stoned to death. Can you imagine how David must have caught his breath when Nathan declared, "You are that man!"? He had just pronounced judgment on himself!

Nathan goes on to recount all that the Lord has done for David – given him the kingdom of Israel that was formerly led by Saul. Along with the kingdom, David had received all of Saul's harem (this was in addition to his own wives!), and if that wasn't enough God would have given him

even more! Such power and affluence unfortunately seemed to go to David's head. He had more wealth, power, wives and concubines than anyone deserved, yet he took the wife of his poor neighbor and had the neighbor killed to cover up his sin. As a result, David's house would experience turmoil and treachery from that day forth, starting with the death of the son born to Bathsheba.

David's rightful punishment for his sin was death. But despite his sin, David would not die, as the Mosaic law prescribed. This is because, when confronted with his sin, David immediately confessed his sin before God. Perhaps it is out of this experience that we get so many of the psalms. We know that Psalm 51 was the direct result of David being confronted with his sin, when he cried out to God:

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

²Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;

so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Many of us find ourselves questioning how David, who committed such vile acts, could be considered a man after God's own heart. It is because he, without flinching, was able to own and confess his sin before God. He did not make excuses, didn't try to deflect blame, and because he humbled himself before God his life was spared. Granted, he did not

avoid the consequences of his sin. It is true that the sword never left the House of David.

Of the multitude of sins found in this story, we may be surprised that the one called out by God was the murder of Uriah, and not David's clandestine relationship with Bathsheba. We do well to remember that there is no hierarchy of sin. Sin is sin, whether it be adultery, deception, abuse of power, or murder, and David was guilty as sin of sin. Granted, David had sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, but his greatest sin was to sin against the God he served. The God who had so richly rewarded him throughout his life. All that he had done showed an incredible lack of gratitude for what God had given him.

While I think it unlikely that any of us here today are, or could be, guilty of the crimes of David, each of us has committed sins in our lives. Some may be sins of commission and others sins of omission, small and less consequential, but sins none the less. Perhaps the prescribed punishment for these sins is not physical death, but we do risk the spiritual death of separation from God. God sees all that we do, and he knows the intention of our hearts.

When confronted with our sins, when we are the ones hearing "You are that man!", we must be prepared to respond as David by humbling ourselves before God. Trusting in the words of the psalmist who wrote:

The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.

⁹He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;

¹⁰he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹²as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Fortunately for David, these words were true. He went on to live a long and prosperous life because he served a forgiving God. Fortunately, for us these words are still true. When we, like David, humble ourselves before God, confessing our sins, in his great love he will forgive us and remove our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. We may still have consequences to pay, but we are no longer separated from God by our sin. That is something for which to be truly grateful.

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