



Diane Christopher

**David: A Man After God's Own Heart?
2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 51
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A church placed a large sign on their corner which boldly announced, "Tired of sinning? Come inside." A few days later someone scrawled below that message, "If not, call 555-9267."

Our passage and message today is about a man who sinned on a grand scale.

You will notice I have two scripture passages listed today. The first one I am going to tell you about (if you want to follow along, the page number is listed for our Pew Bible); the second scripture passage we will read later.

Prayer: Spirit of God, enliven our hearts and minds that, as we hear the Scripture read and proclaimed, we may hear your word for us, each one individually and by name. Grant us courage to receive it, and stir in us a desire to respond in love and faithful obedience. For the sake of Christ, we pray. Amen.

The 2 Samuel passage starts out very innocently: "In the spring of the year..." Ah, it sounds like flowers and bunny rabbits and baby birds chirping. But then something goes wrong: "In the spring of the year, when kings go off to war...David remained in Jerusalem." He sent his own men to fight a battle, but David remained at home. Aren't kings supposed to be with their men in battle? This is a hint that something is wrong.

This is sort of like reading the first statement of a story: "It was a dark and stormy night..." You know right away, that something spooky is going to happen. I remember reading the book that made the author John Grisham famous: "The Firm." By the time I got to page two, I knew something was going to go very wrong.

Many people in our culture may skip over this little detail that David staying home. But someone in David's time reading this knows instantly that something is not right. We aren't told why David stays home. Is he lazy? Is he depressed? Is he spoiled? We don't know. But this is not normal behavior for a king.

Verse 2 doesn't get any better: "One evening, David got up from his bed..." Hmm, was David just getting up? This is not a good sign. David decided to go for a stroll on his roof. It looks like this man doesn't have enough to do...and it gets him into trouble.

You know what it is like to have too much time on your hands. It's easy to get into trouble. You begin to eat too much. Or, watch too much TV. Or, you drink too much. Or, you watch too many things on the Internet that you shouldn't. David's trouble was lust.

As he walks on the roof of his palace, he sees a very beautiful women bathing! And it is all downhill from there. By the way, this is not unusual to have this woman bathing on the roof in that culture. Well, David loses it. He wants her.

To make a long story short, David finds out who she is, and learns she is married. That doesn't stop lust, and he sends for her (he is the King, so he can do whatever he wants, so when he calls for his people, they must obey). He sleeps with Bathsheba, and sends her home. He has satisfied his desire.

But then Bathsheba says the only statement given to her in this whole sordid tale. She sends a message to David and says, 'I am pregnant.'

What's a king to do? He decides to cover up his tracks. He sends for Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. He is fighting in the war for David, you know, the one David skips out on and stays at home. He summons Uriah to the palace and says, "Go home, relax, put your feet up, sleep with your wife."

Uriah is a mighty warrior, one of David's elite soldiers, a loyal soldier. Uriah refuses to do what David says, because his men are out in the field fighting. It would dishonor them to go home and have a pleasant afternoon with his wife while his comrades are fighting and suffering out in the field. David even gets Uriah drunk, hoping he will sleep with his wife, but the man refuses...even drunk. This is a pretty good guy.

David is in a tough spot. He needs to cover up what he did. He writes a letter to his commander, telling him to put Uriah in the frontlines where the battle is the worst. And by the way, don't protect Uriah when you are attacked. Pull back and let him get hit. And that is exactly what happens. Uriah is killed. And to make it worse, other men are killed because of this action. When David is told that others are killed, he says to his commander, "Don't let it upset you; the sword devours one as well as another."

Then, he takes Bathsheba as his wife.

This is a man that the Bible says is a man after God's own heart. Say what? God chose David to be king because David had a heart for God. Well, you think, maybe David just messed up this one time, even though he messed up big time.

Well, I hate to tell you this, but David was a portrait of sin. He sinned on a magnificent scale. Here are some highlights:

In order to marry the daughter of King Saul, David killed 200 Philistines and brought their foreskins to the King (I Samuel 18).

This is a man after God's own heart?

Another time, David fights and defeats the Philistines. He leaves no witnesses; he kills everyone, including women, children, infants.

This is a man after God's own heart?

Let's go into a little more detail. Psalm 137. A lot of Psalms are put to music. Not this one. The Israelites are in exile, taken away by the Babylonians. The author of this Psalm expresses his thoughts about their enemy: "O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!"

A Psalm of David.

This is a man after God's own heart?

"David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live." (2 Samuel 8:2)

This is a man after God's own heart?

One of David's sons rapes one of David's daughters, and David does nothing (2 Samuel 13).

This is a man after God's own heart?

On his deathbed, David says to his son, Solomon: here are the people who have crossed me. Make sure no one survives. (I Kings 2:1-9) David was a dangerous man to know.

This is a man after God's own heart? What did God see in the heart of a man like David?

Back in David's day, God had prophets who spoke for God. The prophet during David's time was Nathan. The story of David and Bathsheba takes place in chapter 11 of 2 Samuel. This is verse 1 of chapter 12: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David."

God had told Nathan what David had done. The rest of chapter 12 tells the story of how Nathan showed David that what he did displeased God. David's reaction is in verse 13: "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.'

Well, that was an easy way out. David's response sounds kind of shallow to me. But you know what? It wasn't shallow. David was shattered by his sin. We don't really learn about David's spirit in the book of Samuel or in the books of the Kings. But we do in the book of Psalms. David is known as the "Sweet Psalmist of Israel."

So, now we turn to the scripture written in your bulletin: Psalm 51. The Psalm has an introduction under the title. It says, "Psalm 51: A psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba." David wrote this Psalm in response to what he did to Bathsheba and Uriah.

Read Psalm 51:1-12 (The word of the Lord....)

David was a portrait of sin on a magnificent scale. David would sin, but he was shattered by his sin. He would sin much, but he loved God more.

There are bad consequences for David's sin that aren't removed and David lives with them rest of his life –there will be terrible ripple effects on others for what he did - but the minute David confesses his sin, Nathan announces God's forgiveness. David is not even asked to do any acts of penance. He simply confesses his sin to God and he's forgiven immediately. That's the way it works.

David had a heart for God because he told God the truth about himself, and he recommends it to us all. In Psalm 32, David says, "When I kept silent [about my sins], my bones wasted away...my strength was sapped as in the heat of the summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity...and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray...."

This is a man after God's own heart.

Just as God came to David that day, God comes to us to do something more profound than condemnation; God comes to change our lives. Eugene Peterson says to recognize and confess our sin is a momentous thing, but it is not "the main event." God's work on our sin is where the real action lies. David's sin, enormous as it was, was wildly outdone by God's grace.

Barbara Brown Taylor, one of my favorite preachers, says this: "Was David a good man or a bad man? You decide. I think he was both, as most of us are. If we remember him

as a hero, I hope it is not because of Goliath, or the psalms, or the war stories. I hope it is because of that moment with Nathan, when he saw who he was and said so, so that God could say, 'Come home.'"

Confession is not for the purpose of condemnation, but of restoration.

Jesus encounters a woman who is about to be stoned to death because of her sin. Jesus says, "Those who are without sin may cast the first stone." One by one, the crowd slinks away, Jesus turns to the woman and says, No one is here to condemn you? Not one? Then neither do I.

Do you struggle? Who will condemn you? Not Christ. Not Christ.

If there is something you need to tell God today, take David's advice: tell the truth to God about yourself, do not cover it up, and God will remove the guilt of your sin and extend to you the grace that never runs out.

I end with a traditional blessing: My friends, go in peace and pray for me, a sinner. Amen.

Offering

I am astounded by God's grace. We are extended grace again and again. In response we give back with thankfulness and generosity. Let us receive our gifts and offerings.

Benediction

Scripture says that one of God's spiritual blessings is that God lavishes on us the riches of his grace. Go in that knowledge and may it bring you peace and joy. Now, to the one....