

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
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After God's Own Heart - "You Are the Man"

So far, the reign of King David has been a great triumph! He has been embraced by Israel, victorious in battle, rewarded by God and described as faithful and just. But as the saying goes, power corrupts. 2 Samuel 11 marks a critical point in the life of David as the story shifts from triumph to tragedy. The downward spiral begins with the infamous story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah.

The Scandal - 2 Samuel 11

Though the story of David and Bathsheba is relatively well known, a quick review is in order:

- v.1 – "In the Spring of the year, when Kings go out to battle." Battle season in the ancient middle east began in the summer after the heavy rains of winter had passed. In this particular year, David chooses not to accompany his troops as they ravage Ammon sending Joab, his trusted commander instead. The monarchy has become an institution and David is endowed with dangerous amounts of leisure time
- v.2-5 – "And it happened one afternoon ..." The details of David's tryst are told very efficiently and yet leave little to the imagination. The writer of 2 Samuel is gifted in the use of words! The only recorded words of Bathsheba tell us all we need to know: "I am pregnant."
- V. 6-13 – Like Adam and Eve in the Garden, and like most of us today, David's first response to his sin is to cover it up. He summons Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, home from the battle and encourages him to enjoy all the comforts of home, in the hope that by being at home he could be seen to be the father of the child. Uriah, however, is the ultimate faithful soldier. He won't go home. Not even after David gets him drunk will he allow himself a night at home
- V. 14-21 – Uriah's faithfulness leads David to an ultimate solution. He conspires to have Uriah sent to the front lines and then to abandon him in the heat of the battle. The tragic irony is that when Uriah returns to the battle he will carry with him the letter authorizing his own death.
- V. 22-27 – David's plan works! Uriah is killed in battle. Joab the commander is grieved at the loss of Uriah and Bathsheba also laments her slain husband. David brings Bathsheba to the palace and she bears a son.

The Law - 2 Samuel 12:1-15

“But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. And the LORD sent Nathan to David.”

2 Samuel 11 shows David as the man who sends people here and there. Now it is God’s turn to do some sending as Nathan is sent to David to confront him over his sin.

Nathan’s parable of the poor man with the single lamb is one of the shrewdest confrontations in the entire Bible. David hears the story, takes the bait, only to learn that he has just condemned himself. The full force of the Law of God comes crashing down on David. Nathan sets aside the story and speaks very directly to the King: “Thus says the LORD the God of Israel, I anointed ... I delivered ... I gave you ... I would add to you much more... **Why have you despised the word of the LORD?** ... you have struck ... you have taken.” (2 Samuel 12:7-9)

The contrast between God’s grace and David’s lust and greed could not be more clearly spelled out. God gave, but David took. He has despised the word of the LORD. And there will be consequences. The sword will not depart from David’s house and evil will rise up against David from within his family.

Confession and Absolution - 2 Samuel 12:13, Psalm 51

One of the things that distinguishes David from Saul is this response to the confrontation of the Law. When Samuel confronted Saul (1 Samuel 13, 15), Saul was quick to justify himself and only after a long debate, does he admit his sin. David in contrast is quick to admit his guilt. There are no excuses. He has sinned against the LORD. And following that confession comes the word of forgiveness, “The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

When something this significant happens in a person’s life, it is not surprising that it would be cause for reflection and prayer. David experience of his sin and God’s forgiveness is preserved for us in Psalm 51, the best known of the 7 penitential psalms.

The most straightforward outline of this Psalm is to divide it into 2 parts. Confession (v. 1-9) and Restoration (10-19).

Confession

- V. 1-2 are a summary of the entire psalm. David pleads God’s steadfast love (hesed) to blot out his transgressions, sins and iniquities.
- V. 3-5 focus on how life is permeated with sin and that all sin is ultimately against God. Interestingly there is no groveling, but an honest realization of our need of God’s justice and mercy.

- V. 6-9 shift from guilt to the real desires of God. His law is a mirror, showing our sin, but also a guide to living the new life. David desires forgiveness that his life may more accurately reflect God's truth and wisdom.

Restoration

- V. 10-12 Having acknowledged his sin, David now prays for restoration. He urgently calls on God to create, renew, not cast away, not take away, restore and uphold him. By using words like create and restore David is acknowledging that nothing short of a miracle will save him.
- V. 13-15 focus on the outcomes in David's life. Remembering the essence of David's sin was his despising of the word of God, he now seeks to align his words with God's word – teaching, singing, and declaring God's praise.
- V. 16-19 the closing verses of the psalm speak of the worship life of the individual and of the nation. "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8

The fact that the writer of Samuel was inspired to include these darker stories the portrait of David suggests that there is no agenda of hero worship. Instead, through these recounting of sinful actions we become convinced of the need for a future royal figure in his line who would transcend the failings of not only David but also those who ruled in his place until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

Ultimately such a figure is Jesus Christ who lived a blameless life, and through this Messiah the words of God through Nathan take on new significance for all those who believe on his name: "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

As we see David's struggle with sin, however, we also see the kind of struggle we all face. David's sin was not just a private affair, but rather impacted his family, Uriah's family, and ultimately the entire nation. This reminds us of the severe implications of sin for ourselves and for our communities of influence (e.g., family, church, business, land). But this event also reminds us that there is a way forward, that where sin abounds, grace abounds yet more. David's penitential response ("I have sinned against the LORD") is based on his confidence in the grace that God affords those who have broken his will.