

*David | The Once and Future King*  
*The Word Made Flesh (to David)*  
*Second Samuel CH 12.1-14; Matthew 3.1-3*  
*11.28.21 (Advent ONE)*

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, "There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. 2 "The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. 3 "But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. 4 "Now a traveler came to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

5 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. 6 "He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion."

7 Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 'I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9 'Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 10 '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.' 11 "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. 12 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" 13 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. 14 "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."

(Matthew 3) Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight!'"

This is the First Sunday in Advent. That's a church calendar word; it's still used in secular contexts for instance when people say "with the advent of the computer age..." It means Arrival or Coming as in the wait for the coming of God in Christ.

Different Christian traditions observe Advent differently to prepare people to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. In the High Church worship of the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, Episcopalian and Lutheran traditions it's a period for fasting and reflection (not a time for parties – those come after Christmas) and so in the Eastern tradition it's called "The Winter Lent."

This year we'll veer a little into that lane (our High Church brothers and sisters) and use Advent in the way they do (not saying you can't go to parties) but DO use the time to "prepare ye the way of the Lord!" This was, of course, the message of that last great prophet, John the Baptizer, who urged people to greet this soon-to-be revealed Christ with repentant hearts.

And since we've been working up to one of the most notorious sins in the Bible ...followed by an equally well-known repentance, so for the next few weeks, leading up to Christmas, we hope to look at David's repentance as a pattern or paradigm of this practice that... some people think of as outdated or primitive or even psychologically unhealthy or at least undignified.

But we hope to see that this practice or remedy is actually "good for what ails ya" and is most often a doorway into deeper psychological/spiritual health.

Truth is: without it one cannot become a Christian and without it one cannot continue in that life. Today, we begin to consider repentance starting with:

- 1) A Hindrance to the Remedy
- 2) The Feel of the Remedy
- 3) The Results of the Remedy

First, a hindrance to the remedy: we saw last week that the believer, David, was responsible for a lot of different sins in this infamous collapse. Adultery and murder are the obvious ones but he also dishonored his parents, makes a woman an idol, bears false witness – he breaks all the Ten Commandments.

But we also said that at the root of David's poison tree was his own arrogance: he'd forgotten who he was in relation to God. He failed to see and delight in the most basic spiritual truth, that God made David (not the other way around!)

The king had forgotten that he was on God's mind, in God's view, LOVED by God. And neglecting those realities left a gaping hole in David's life. He was NOT satisfied and filled with the love of God and so he turns to "all the vain things that charm me most."

And when we tune in today, David, still under the intoxicating influence of arrogance David gets a call from his pastor. "I'm sure this is going to be pleasant...because pastors are just pleasant people!"

And the pastor, the Prophet Nathan, tells King David about a little problem in the realm – a very UNPLEASANT dispute between two of the citizens. "There were two men in one city; one was rich, the other poor. The rich man had scores and hundreds of sheep and cattle but the poor man had one little lamb... Uh, are you with me, Your Highness?"

"Yes, yes! Go on, please! I'm very intrigued!"

"Well, this poor man, REALLY loved his little lamb, cared for her and fed her from his own table...you know: like one of the kids...like his own daughter."

"Then one day, the rich man had some guests drop in from out-of-town but he really didn't want to slaughter one of his livestock...even though he had hundreds to choose from... Still, following me there Your Majesty?"

"Yes, yes! Please go on – the suspense is killing me!"

"Well, the rich man took the sheep that belonged to the poor man – that one solitary lamb and he had his men slaughter it and serve it to his guests at the dinner party!"

Then, David's anger burned greatly against the man and said to his pastor, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this DESERVES TO DIE."

And Nathan said, "YOU are the man."

Now three observations: First, David's moral sensibilities are keen and intact. By his answer, it's clear. He's not a modern, loose and lax, moral relativist who doesn't believe in right and wrong. Morality is very important to David. He is a man of principle and law and order.

And this points to a kind of correlation between principled people and arrogance. Moral and respectable people are probably more susceptible to arrogance than are the super-tolerant, open minded, laid-back people who are freethinking and easy-going and permissive.

AND, we should also point out that super open-minded, non-judgmental, lenient people are often, unknowingly principled people IN THAT they're stubbornly opposed to people who are NOT tolerant – they're often very intolerant of people they perceive to be intolerant...

So, really, we're all a lot more prone to arrogance than we realize (there's always SOMEone to look down on!) whether you're open-minded or have lots of standards and convictions.

Secondly, as we saw last week, David's apparently become quick to anger. AND arrogance and anger often go together. David's angry and blind to his anger. David is blind to his arrogance. He's blind to his sin. He can't get the remedy, unable to repent. He seems to be doing ok without it...so, no need.

But, THIRD, when David hears this story of injustice, he's so indignant, so righteous, so just and strict with OTHER people and their failings. And it points out: we see the sins of others much better than we see our own sins AND the sins of others strike us as more obnoxious and serious than our own sins – David's sin is far worse than the rich man's!

Jesus Christ said it: "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but don't notice the LOG in your OWN eye?" (Matthew 7.3)

David's self-righteous anger and angry moralism are keeping him from the remedy!

Now, let me put the question to you: are you just a little bit open to the possibility that you don't see your own real flaws and faults? Because, if you CAN get open to that possibility, then MAYBE the remedy is already at work in you.

Notice also while David is blind and has been that way for at least nine-months, God is going to make the blind man see. And when David DOES see, it's going to be PAINFUL LIKE DEATH! David's about to feel that exCRUCiating trauma of exposure: the feel of the remedy!

And the vehicle for this traumatic uncovering (when the fig leaves are torn away) – the agent is a person, sent from God with a story – the Word of God is made flesh in a man named GRACE (Nathan means to give or gift). The man named GIFT brings a parable and that story from God goes to work on David.

You may ask, "Well why didn't God just press this sense of guilt directly down into David's conscience?"

Well... because... that's not the way God normally does it. He uses human interaction, communication and relationship. David knew and trusted Nathan (7.2). It's the people in our lives who often see us as we are. While we're ALL capable of astonishing self-deception and self-justification, the people around us can often see it all so clearly.

It's another reason in a long list of reasons why the Christian life is impossible without the Church. It can't be an individual journey. I need people to help me see myself because I don't see myself truly.

Nathan, the word of grace made flesh, sent from God, comes with a skillful little story, he could have just blurted out, "You're a lying, murdering, adulterer and God knows all about you! REPENT!" But instead there's an alluring, artistic, appealing conscience-awakening story – a scalpel that heals as it cuts.

And what I should learn from this is that I need to invest in communication, NOT so that I'm always non-offensive and so people will always like me (because, you know: pastors ARE always pleasant!) but rather for the good of others. Communication takes care.

Nathan's communication wasn't watered-down but neither was it blurted out – it was skillful and effective to awaken and reclaim the offender. Notice how Nathan's message repeats the word "man" – "There were two men, a rich man and a poor man...and the poor man ...and the rich man took the lamb..."

"And David burned in anger against the man and Nathan said, "You ARE the man." Nathan's parable made David angry with David.

And NOT only did Jesus Christ take the art of the parable to a new level but His life itself was a parable, a Grace-Story sent from God. Hearing Nathan's parable makes us think of this larger story – THE Story – the disarming Good News Story in which God flies under the radar and we can't resist listening – God portrays

right before our eyes the Story of the beautiful life, a Life perfectly lived in pure love. And God bids us look at the Story – “behold the Life that YOU should’ve lived but didn’t. This is love.” (John 13.34).

And then God skillfully portrays a picture of a Man separated from God and under God’s raw displeasure... It’s a picture of a Man getting what sin deserves...

Pontius Pilate parades Him out wearing the crown of thorns and the silly purple robe and tells us, “Ecce Homo” – “behold the Man”. (John 19.5) This is YOU! This is what YOU and your sin deserve. Behold!

John the Baptist too bids us, “Behold, the Lamb” (John 1.29, 39) this is justice and mercy meeting, a Man counted guilty with David’s guilt and mine, a Lamb who stands in your place... “LOOK!” says God, “at what YOU deserve and look what I have taken FOR you in order to declare you innocent and right.”

And it’s NOT until we hear, “YOU are the man!” or “YOU are the woman!” It’s not till we see that this isn’t just a sad story of an ancient martyrdom or something abstract and religious – the Cross of Jesus IS a symbol but not merely a symbol. It tells MY Story of what I deserved and what God took for me.

David hears this sermon – it’s a sermon about someone else – some bad, arrogant person – someone OUT there! And David’s righteous anger burns and it’s religious and hypocritical and worthless. IT’S NOT UNTIL DAVID SEES: “This is about ME – I AM the man...but much worse!” And when that redemptive trauma comes home to David, he begins to see again... it’s no longer safe/secret; it’s painful like death – that’s the feel of this remedy.

BUT...it’s actually more like a birth...like labor-pains, like a baby being born. And so for us too: it’s so safe to think about THEM, the bad guys who are really messed up and sin sensational, scandalous sins...the people who are really messed up. We may sit on the sidelines angry at people who are judgmental and narrow, the harsh justice-mongers and over-zealous hypocrites. OR, we may sit secure and angry about the careless, the immoral, the perverted who disdain tradition and want to change everything...

WHICHEVER way we bend, it’s always safe to think about them – “that man deserves to die!” But until we hear the word sent from God, “YOU are the man”, until the Gospel becomes traumatic to me... I have to be like Rembrandt who not only painted the moment when Christ’s Cross was being raised only to THUD down into the hole that’d been dug for it... but Rembrandt painted himself in the picture... If I don’t see myself in the picture and MYSELF in need of ongoing forgiveness and moral renovation... I really can’t be of help to THEM.

But when I am personally troubled by the Cross-Story and I see, “I am the one who needs this Story – I NEED Jesus Christ to live in my place, to die for my faults... it’s NOT for the ABSTRACT “THEM” – it’s for the ACTUAL ME (Jesus is for ME!) THEN I begin to live honestly and Jesus becomes MY Rescuer and the Gospel becomes the best news I could ever envision!

This is what is beginning to happen in David. He hears, “David... you didn’t need Bathsheba – you had Me and I would’ve ushered you into truth, beauty and goodness like you’ve never dreamed.” And even now as David takes these first steps into repentance and chokes out the words, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And IMMEDIATELY he’s told, “The LORD has taken away your sin and you shall not die.”

And the healing of holy love begins to make David a new man. It’s not unholy, syrupy love – it’s not being “nice”; no, it takes sin seriously and there will even be real and painful temporal consequences. God’s going to pursue David’s heart through pain. And this holy love takes sin so seriously that it pays the Price, “The LORD has taken the penalty to Himself, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, will be charged with David’s sin.” Arrogance and sin are no game.

But also, there’s a terrible beauty and power... a JOY in this passage. David is the culprit but he’s the beloved culprit. God WILL have David’s heart and David WILL know the joy of forgiveness/restoration.

Next time we plan to look at the Heart Song that came out of this experience. I sincerely hope (and ask that YOU would pray for all of us) that God will lead us out of self-deception and INTO that redemptive trauma that leads to joy, to hear, “You are the man/woman, the beloved culprit whose heart I have to have.”