

The Life of David

David Rebuked by Nathan

2 Samuel 12:1-15

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Scripture

Second Samuel chapters 10 to 12 describe David's battle with the Ammonites. Sandwiched in the middle of these chapters is the shocking account of David's dreadful sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, which we examined last time. Months later, the Lord sent his prophet Nathan to confront David about his sin.

Let's read Nathan's rebuke of David in 2 Samuel 12:1-15:

¹And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." ⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed

him with the sword of the Ammonites. 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 out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’ ” ¹³ David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.” ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house. (2 Samuel 12:1-15)

Introduction

Many months passed by after King David’s sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. Bathsheba became pregnant and David was confronted by Nathan after the birth of that child. So, at least nine months had gone by before Nathan spoke to David. Some commentators believe that it was as many as eighteen months after David’s illicit liaison with Bathsheba that Nathan confronted him. The point is that for many months David tried to forget what he had done. He had suppressed any pangs of conscience he might have felt about his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah.

Someone once wrote, “Most of us find peace over past sins by trying to forget and move on. We find comfort in the distance that comes with the passing of time. The further we are from our sins, the less we feel they mark our lives and the less guilty we feel... Do I even remember half of the wrongs I’ve done? The truth is that I’ve conveniently forgotten most of my violations.” Does that resonate with you? I know it does with me. The author goes on to tell the following story:

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I read a newspaper story about a woman named Jill Price who has a rare condition doctors call “superior autobiographical memory.” Jill can recall in vivid detail every day of her life since age fourteen. Experts at the University of California studied her for six years to confirm her ability. If you’ve ever wished you had a better memory, you might want to reconsider. Jill views it as a blessing and a curse. She has warm memories that comfort her in difficult times, but there’s also a dark side. She recalls every bad decision, every insult, and every excruciating embarrassment. Over the years, Jill said, the memories have eaten her up. She feels paralyzed and assaulted by them. Peaceful sleep is rare.

We all want to think of ourselves as basically good people. But we can believe that illusion only because we forget most of our past decisions and actions and thoughts. But what if we remembered them perfectly? God does.¹

Indeed. God does remember our sin. Even though we may forget them, he does not. God will hold us accountable for our sin.

This is particularly true for believers. As his adopted children, he wants us to enjoy our fellowship with him. When we sin, we fall out of fellowship. God wants to restore our fellowship with him.

The narrative of David being rebuked by Nathan is really a story of God’s grace reaching out to an adopted son who has grievously sinned in order to restore him to fellowship with himself.

Lesson

Second Samuel 12:1-15 shows us three steps God uses to restore sinners back into fellowship with himself.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The First Step Is Conviction (12:1-12)
2. The Second Step Is Repentance (12:13a)
3. The Third Step Is Forgiveness (12:13b-15)

¹ Joshua Harris, *Dug Down Deep* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 2010), 101.

I. The First Step Is Conviction (12:1-12)

The first step is conviction.

A true conviction of sin is essential as a first step in restoring broken fellowship. True fellowship with God is an open, honest relationship where there is no unconfessed sin.

Interestingly, in 2 Samuel 11, the word “sent” or “send” appears 11 times (vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 [three times], 14, 18, 22, 27). It is an important word in the chapter. Most of the time, it is King David who “sent” messengers to Bathsheba or Joab or Uriah to carry out his sin or to cover up his sin.

It is striking, therefore, when we get to verse 1 of 2 Samuel 12 and read these words, **“And the Lord sent Nathan to David.”** Now it is the Lord who **“sent”** his prophet Nathan to David. To David, the Lord may have seemed distant or unconcerned. But that was most certainly not the case. The Lord was watching every time David **“sent”** to carry out or cover up his sin. The Lord was graciously giving David time to repent of his actions. Finally, the Lord himself took action and **“sent”** his prophet to confront David about his sin.

What Nathan did was brilliant. We are not given any details but I assume that he prayed fervently and thought carefully about how to approach the king. He was, of course, personally known to the king and it would not have been difficult for him to get an audience with David. But, how does one confront another person about his sin? That is not so easy.

Nathan used an indirect approach with David. If he had started by saying that David had sinned, David might have been defensive or dismissive. Instead, Nathan found a way that caused David to convict himself. Nathan told David a story. But he told the story in such a way that David thought that Nathan was telling him about a real-life injustice that was occurring in the kingdom.

Nathan told David about two men. One man was rich with

many flocks and herds. The other man was poor who only had one little ewe lamb that was much-loved. In fact, the lamb was like a daughter to him. When a traveler visited the rich man, the rich man gave him a meal of lamb. But instead of slaughtering one of his own “many flocks,” he took the poor man’s lamb (who was like a daughter to him) and prepared it for the visitor (12:1b-4).

Attentive Hebrew scholars note that Nathan used a play on words here because the Hebrew word for “daughter” (*bath*) is the same as the first part of the name for Bathsheba (*Bath-Sheba*, which means “daughter of Sheba”). David missed that literary nuance.

As I mentioned, David thought that Nathan was telling him about an actual injustice. He was furious when he heard this. Verses 5-6 say, **“Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, ‘As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.’”** David’s sense of justice kicked in and he demanded that restitution be made for this wrong.

Verse 7a is the key verse in this narrative, **“Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’”** In the Hebrew text there are only two words and it reads something like, “You the man!” In our contemporary culture, we use a similar expression when we say to someone, “You the man!” By that we mean that the person has done something good or heroic. However, Nathan meant to tell David that he had done something bad and horrific. Though David was rich and had many wives, he had taken poor Uriah’s only wife. Moreover, David had Uriah killed to cover up his sin.

Nathan did not wait for David to respond. He went on to pronounce the findings of the Lord who was David’s judge. Nathan emphasized this by saying, **“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel”** (12:7a). He then delivered a three-point indictment against David.

First, Nathan reminded David that God had done great

things for him. He had called him to be king over his earthly kingdom. Moreover, God would have given David even greater things in his future if he had just asked for them (12:7-8).

Second, Nathan rebuked David for despising the word of the Lord in killing Uriah so that he could marry Bathsheba (12:9).

And third, Nathan pronounced a sentence for each of his sins against Uriah and Bathsheba (12:10-12). For his murder of Uriah, **“the sword shall never depart”** from his house. During the rest of David’s reign, he constantly experienced conflict. Furthermore, three of David’s son’s died by the sword (Amnon, 13:29; Absalom, 18:15; and Adonijah, 1 Kings 2:25). And, if you include the death of the infant son of Bathsheba, there was a “fourfold” restitution for David’s sin (*cf.* Exodus 22:1). For his taking of Uriah’s wife, his own wives would be taken from him and sinned against in full view of the public. This was fulfilled during the rebellion of Absalom (16:22).

Conviction of sin is more than someone else convicting us of sin. It has to be a personal apprehension of our own sin. Or, to put it differently, we must convict ourselves of our own sin. That is exactly what David did when he angrily called for justice in Nathan’s story. Commentator Gordon Keddie writes:

Conviction of sin is, of course, sorrowful admission of guilt. Sometimes when someone has told us that we have done wrong and this has been exposed to public view, we may only feel sorry because we have been caught and put to public shame. Deep down we bitterly resent being brought to account and are more angry than contrite. This is not true conviction of sin, for a true sorrow is not accompanied by resentment and anger, but rather accepts the justice of our condemnation. It cries *‘Mea culpa’* (‘I am guilty’) with profound sincerity of heart.²

² Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1990), 110–111.

So, the first step God uses to restore sinners back into fellowship with himself is conviction of sin.

II. The Second Step Is Repentance (12:13a)

The second step is repentance.

After Nathan had spoken to David, we read these words in verse 13, **“David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’”** These words are simple and sincere. There was no equivocation in David’s words. We know that to be the case because he was forgiven and also because he wrote a psalm of confession (Psalm 51).

Now, attentive readers of Scripture may recall that David’s predecessor, King Saul, also acknowledged his sin against the Lord. In fact, on three occasions, Saul said, “I have sinned” (1 Samuel 15:24, 15:30; 26:21). Yet, Saul did not repent. He was contrite. He felt that he had been caught out. He said that he had sinned. But he was not repentant. And the reason I say that is because there was no fruit of repentance in Saul’s life.

David said, **“I have sinned against the Lord.”** Those were not merely words said so that he could move on with his life. David was truly repentant.

We sometimes see someone say on TV, “I am sorry if I have caused you pain.” Or, “I am sorry if you have been hurt.” That is such a hollow apology. The one making the apology is not taking responsibility for the wrong done. He is actually shifting the blame to the person he has wronged. After all, if that person did not feel any pain or hurt, then there would be no need for an apology.

David does none of that. He truly repents. As I mentioned, we know that David’s repentance was sincere because he was forgiven. Moreover, David wrote Psalm 51, which was written, as he said, “when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” Here is what David wrote in Psalm 51:1–4, “Have

mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”

David understood the magnitude of his sin and he repented of his sin.

So, the first step God uses to restore sinners back into fellowship with himself is conviction of sin. The second step is repentance.

III. The Third Step Is Forgiveness (12:13b-15)

And the third step is forgiveness.

Verse 13b says, **“And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.’ ”** The penalty for adultery in Leviticus 20:10 would not be applied to David. In terms of his eternal standing before God, David’s sin would not be accounted to him. It would be accounted to his Greater Son, Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for all of David’s sin. Therefore, David’s forgiveness was complete. His fellowship with God was restored.

Yet, forgiveness does not mean the removal of the consequences of sin. The thief who steals may be forgiven and yet still be required to make restitution for what was stolen. The person who commits murder may be forgiven but still has to suffer the consequences for his murder by going to prison. If consequences were eliminated by a simple act of repentance, then justice would become ineffective.

We see the consequences for David’s sin applied to him as Nathan said in verse 14b, **“Nevertheless,...the child who is born to you shall die.”** This is not easy to hear. Why did God do

this? The child did nothing. David's sin was responsible for the death of the child. I don't have a comforting answer to the questions and objections we may want to raise. However, I do want to remind us that God is just in all his ways and he never does anything wrong. Sometimes, we just have to be quiet and wait until glory to get answers to all our questions and objections. However, Nathan did give David a reason for the death of the child when he said to David that it was **“because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord”** (12:14a). God took this action “in order to vindicate his reputation for righteousness among die nations.”³

Yes, the consequences of sin will mark our lives forever. But, fellowship with God is restored.

So, the first step God uses to restore sinners back into fellowship with himself is conviction of sin. The second step is repentance. And the third step is forgiveness.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the account of Nathan rebuking David in 2 Samuel 12:1-15, let us be assured that God's grace is greater than all our sin.

In his book titled *Grace*, Max Lucado writes:

Ever since my high school buddy and I drank ourselves sick with a case of quarts, I have liked beer....Out of the keg, tap, bottle, or frosty mug—it doesn't matter to me. I like it.

[But I also know that] alcoholism haunts my family ancestry. I have early memories of following my father through the halls of a rehab center to see his sister. Similar scenes repeated themselves with other relatives for decades. Beer doesn't mix well with my family DNA. So at the age of twenty-one, I swore off it....

Then a few years back something resurrected my cravings....At some point I reached for a can of brew instead of a can

³ Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, 113.

of soda, and as quick as you can pop the top, I was a beer fan again. A once-in-a-while...then once-a-week...then once-a-day beer fan.

I kept my preference to myself. No beer at home, lest my daughters think less of me. No beer in public. Who knows who might see me? None at home, none in public leaves only one option: convenience-store parking lots. For about a week I was that guy in the car, drinking out of the brown paper bag.

No, I don't know what resurrected my cravings, but I remember what stunted them. En route to speak at a men's retreat, I stopped for my daily purchase. I walked out of the convenience store with a beer pressed against my side, scurried to my car for fear of being seen, opened the door, climbed in, and opened the can.

Then it dawned on me. I had become the very thing I hate: a hypocrite. A pretender. Two-faced. Acting one way. Living another. I had written sermons about people like me—Christians who care more about appearance than integrity. It wasn't the beer but the cover-up that nauseated me.

[So what] happened with my hypocrisy? First I threw the can of beer in the trash. Next I sat in the car for a long time, praying. Then I scheduled a visit with our church elders. I didn't embellish or downplay my actions; I just confessed them. And they, in turn, pronounced forgiveness over me. Jim Potts, a dear, silver-haired saint, reached across the table and put his hand on my shoulder and said something like this: "What you did was wrong. But what you are doing tonight is right. God's love is great enough to cover your sin. Trust his grace."⁴

Friends, whatever our sin, let us be convicted of our sin, truly repent of our sin, and then receive God's forgiveness for our sin.

God's grace was greater than David's sin. It is greater than your sin. And it is greater than my sin. Amen.

⁴ Max Lucado, *Grace* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2012), 89-91.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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