

SI: We’re studying the life of King David because we want to know David’s Son.

INTRO: I had a humiliating experience last week that was witnessed by Becky Lewis. Becky had stopped by our house at lunchtime to drop something off. I was home for lunch, so when she pulled up Allison and I went outside. While we were talking to her in the driveway a dog ran up to us from next door and a man we didn’t know came over to get the dog. We assumed he was a relative of our next door neighbor so we asked him how our neighbor is doing. We knew he had some health problems.

This man we didn’t know gave us a disgusted look and said:

You want to know how he’s doing? He died a year ago.

We said: We’re so sorry. We didn’t know.

He said: You didn’t know? You could have knocked on his door and asked. You could have checked on him. That’s what neighbors do.

So I went back to the church after lunch but I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

When I got home Allison and I talked and we admitted we had both come up with all sorts of justifications.

We know our other neighbors.

We talk to them and check on them and have become a part of their lives.

This man never came out of his house and had never knocked on our door.

If he had needed something he could have asked.

We are busy, and this relative with the dog, whoever he was, he was abrasive

But we also both admitted our excuses were bogus.

We had failed to be good neighbors to this man.

The Bible says love you neighbor as you love yourself but we didn’t do that.

Now he’s dead and we can’t ever make things right.

And we admitted the man with the dog spoke the truth.

Allison said: All we can do is ask God for forgiveness and ask the people next door for forgiveness and promise to be better neighbors.

So we sat on the couch and prayed and asked God to forgive us.

And then we talked about how even though we prayed we didn’t feel forgiven, so we had to believe God had forgiven us even though we still felt rotten.

I think maybe the Holy Spirit let me have that experience last week because he

knew I would be preaching on this passage.
This is such a powerful, dramatic chapter in the Bible.

It's a story that is woven into our consciousness as believers.
So let's look at it again under three points.

1. The consequences of sin
2. The shrewdness of grace
3. The assurance of pardon

MP#1 The consequences of sin

Nathan comes to David with the story of an injustice that has happened.

You have to remember the executive and judicial branches were combined in Israel.

There were courts and judges, but the king was the highest judge in the land.

That's why it was plausible for Nathan to bring this case to David.

So after Nathan tells David about this rich man who takes the poor man's pet lamb and cooks it and serves it to his guests, David says two things.

He says: The man who did this deserves to die.

Then he says that he must pay for the lamb four times over.

We'll get back to his first comment in a minute, let's focus on the second one.

In the law of Moses, if your neighbor's animal died because of your negligence—

Let's say you had a well that should have been covered and his sheep falls in, then the law said you had to replace his animal. One for one.

If you stole an animal and were caught with the animal still alive, then not only would your neighbor get his animal back, you had to make double restitution—you had to give him two additional animals.

If you stole an animal and killed it, ate it, sold the meat, whatever, then you had to make fourfold restitution—

you had to pay four animals for the one you stole and killed.

David knows the law. This man will pay fourfold.

Well, the irony is David has pronounced his own punishment.

David had to pay fourfold for his sin. He lost four of his sons.

First, the son born to him and Bathsheba from their affair.

That child dies soon after this conversation with Nathan.

Then a year or two later David's son Amnon is killed by another son Absalom.

Absalom kills his half brother because Amnon raped Absalom's sister Tamar.

Then a few years later Absalom himself is killed in a rebellion against David.

Finally, after David has passed away, his firstborn son Adonijah is executed by Solomon for conspiring to take the throne for himself.

As the account of David's life unfolds you'll see that these last three deaths in particular were set in motion by the effects of David's sin with Bathsheba.

That sin deeply harmed David's later moral judgments and his relationships with his children which led to this turmoil and violence in his family.

There were other consequences.

One was that his affair with Bathsheba turned an old friend into a bitter enemy.

Last week I pointed out the significant detail that both Bathsheba's father, Eliam,

and her husband, Uriah, were not ordinary soldiers.

They were members of David's elite bodyguard, The Thirty.

Well, there is one more detail I didn't mention last week.

Eliam, Bathsheba's father, was the son of Ahithophel.

Ahithophel was the wisest of all of David's senior counselors.

He became embittered by David's affair with his granddaughter.

Several years later when Absalom rebelled and tried to take the throne,

Ahithophel sided with Absalom.

It was a devastating blow to David both personally and militarily.

Ahithophel came up with a strategy that would have guaranteed David's death and the success of Absalom's rebellion.

Fortunately for David, Absalom didn't follow Ahithophel's advice, but even so, it probably prolonged the rebellion.

Furthermore, Absalom's rebellion broke open some old tribal divisions in Israel which David had been able to mostly heal through his wise and good governing. So in David's later life he had to deal with worrisome political problems that he probably never would have faced if he hadn't sinned.

Nathan said to David: The Lord has taken away your sin. You will not die.

Nathan also said to David, Because of what you have done, the sword will not depart from your house and the child born to you and Bathsheba will die.

God's forgiveness doesn't eradicate the historical fact of a sin or its consequences in the world. That may seem inconsistent with grace and forgiveness but it's not. The Bible reaffirms this over and over in teaching and example.

O LORD our God . . . you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds. Psalm 99: 8

Also, other people sometimes suffer from the repercussions of our sins, even when we're forgiven. That was certainly true in David's life.

Our heavenly Father wants us to take this warning to heart.

When you read this passage, you can't ignore this flag that's being waved.

Sins have consequences, even for forgiven people.

But there's nothing surprising about that.

What is surprising is that God forgave David. Let's look at how that happened.

Let's look at

MP#2 The shrewdness of grace

It had been over nine months since the adultery and murder.

The child they had conceived had been born.

David had apparently buried any remorse he had and gotten on with life.
So God sends Nathan the prophet.

It's easy to imagine Nathan storming in with his guns blazing.

Publically denounce David with irrefutable evidence.

Instead he tells him this story about the rich man stealing and eating the pet lamb.

We looked at David's second remark, about this man paying fourfold.

But look again at the first thing David says:

He swears: As surely as the LORD lives—this is quite an oath.

As surely as Yahweh lives, the man who did this deserves to die.

The law of Moses didn't require the death penalty for stealing an animal.

But David was furious. He wanted the man killed. Why?

Listen to what one commentator wrote:

As king it was David's obligation to dispense justice and protect his subjects, but in the affair with Bathsheba and Uriah he had done precisely the opposite. Now, as he listened to Nathan's tale, David's compensatory zeal to be a champion of justice is provoked.

David's compensatory zeal—isn't that a perfect description!

In other words, when you try to deny your guilty conscience,

oftentimes that makes you unusually self-righteous in other areas of life.

David tries to compensate for his guilt by being a champion of justice.

Does this man think there's no justice in my kingdom. I'll show him.

Here's how the commentator concludes:

David, by his excessive anger condemns himself and he is now the helpless target of the denunciation that Nathan will unleash.

And Nathan does unleash. You are the man.

But what's important to see is that "you are the man" wasn't Nathan's introduction, it was his conclusion.

I said a moment ago it's easy to imagine a prophet of God boldly storming into

David's throne room and denouncing him—Murderer!

Why did Nathan beat around the bush so to speak?

Was he afraid to come right out and say it? Was he working up his nerve?

No. Nathan wasn't afraid, he was reflecting the grace of God.

When there is any hope of persuasion grace goes for conviction not condemnation.

Grace doesn't denounce someone in such a way that sets them up for failure.

Of course God is glorified when righteousness and truth is declared,
but God is glorified more when the person repents.
It's very easy to condemn a person in such a way that their defense mechanisms
are raised so high they will never repent.
I've done that to people. There've been times I wasn't a vehicle for God's grace.
I was correct and I was self-righteous.

Look at David again.

Nobody sins like he did without spinning a web of rationalization and self-pity.

There might be any number of reasons for spinning that web.

For David it was being in a position of leadership.

When you're a leader you're often isolated, criticized, and treated impersonally.

You tell yourself: Nobody knows what I have to put up with.

Nobody truly appreciates the sacrifices I make. And self-pity grows.

Then there's an opportunity for a bribe or embezzlement or abuse of power
or an affair and self-pity has paved the way to say: I deserve this.

And then it also provides a rationalization to cover up.

Too much is at stake if this comes out, the institution will be harmed,
the public trust will be shaken, this is acceptable collateral damage.

That's the delusion of people in leadership, but as I said, there are other settings
in which self-pity grows such as disappointments, broken dreams, abuse.

For grace to break through those defenses it doesn't start with a frontal attack.

It seeks to convict and convert. That's how Nathan approached David.

What's the application for us?

It means we all need to be Nathans and have Nathans.

We need to be Nathans to each other. Our sincere desire and motivation
must be to convict and convert when we're dealing with someone's sins,
not to condemn.

That takes patience, that takes wisdom. It also takes courage.

Because one response to this is: I'll just not say anything at all and let
the Holy Spirit and sanctification work it out. But that's not an option.

We also need to have Nathans in our lives.

Hebrews 3:13, Exhort one another daily, while it is still called today, that none
of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Have humble, open mind when your actions and attitudes are criticized.

MP#3 The assurance of pardon

This episode in David's life shows us the consequences of sin.

It shows us the shrewdness of grace, which is surprising, because it's not how we imagine God confronting sin.

But the most surprising and remarkable thing is the assurance of pardon.

I'm specifically talking about Nathan's statement to David:

The Lord has taken away your sin, you are not going to die.

David's adultery was an act of passion, his murder of Uriah was premeditated.

It took days for David to make this plan.

And Uriah wasn't the only one killed. To make his death look like an accident of war, other Israelite soldiers were sent with him and were also struck down.

This was a heinous crime that David committed.

And David didn't confess of his own accord.

He only confessed after he was confronted.

So how could Nathan say: God has taken away your sin?

How can God pardon us for the bad we've done and the good we've left undone?

Eugene Peterson points out that there's a remarkable verbal resonance between this account of David and Nathan and the account of Jesus and Pilate.

Nathan says about David: You are the man.

Pilate says about Jesus: Behold the man.

These scenes happened in two courtrooms, the courtroom of David and of Pilate.

And in both of them things are topsy-turvy.

In 2 Samuel 12, the man on the judge's seat should be the accused.

In the Gospels, the man being accused should be on the judge's seat.

God sends a prophet to rectify the first situation and set things right.

In comes Nathan, he says: You are the man.

David the judge become the accused and he repents.

But in Pilate's courtroom nobody shows up to set things right.

No prophet appears and looks at Pilate and the Jewish leaders and says—

You are the guilty ones here. I doesn't happen. Jesus is condemned.

And at the crucifixion, nobody shows up.

The judge of all the earth and the one perfect man died condemned

so that we Davids, when we repent, can receive God's forgiveness.

He was accused so we could be acquitted.

He died so we can live.

And the assurance of pardon comes when you affirm and believe Jesus died for you

and when you quit trying to atone for your own sins.

Back in the old video cassette days, we had a stack of VHS movies that we would watch over and over. One was *Bridge on the River Kwai*.

Do you remember that classic? Our girls didn't like it, but Will and I did.

There's a British officer played by Alec Guinness who is a prisoner of the Japanese.

The Japanese need a bridge over the River Kwai for their war effort.

But the Japanese engineers can't figure out how to build the bridge.

So after they fail this officer says, we're going to show these incompetent, inferior Japanese how the British can build a proper bridge.

Out of racial and national pride he orders the POWs to build this amazing bridge.

But he's so self-righteous he can't see he's actually helping the enemy.

So the Allies hear about this bridge and they send special forces to blow it up.

Their plan falls apart, the Japanese see them and start shooting them.

One of these special forces soldiers is wounded, he's dying and he looks up and sees this British officer and he says: You!

It's a David moment for him. He suddenly realizes, I've helped the enemy.

In my pride for this bridge, I've helped the enemy and good men are dying.

He says: What have I done?

And he runs through a hail of bullets and falls on the detonator and blows up the bridge and dies atoning for his sin.

That's what we want to be able to. We want to atone for our sins.

That would make us feel forgiven, if we could set things right.

But we can't. For many reasons we can't.

Often times there's damage that simply can't be undone and opportunities for doing good that are lost forever. David's story shows that in Technicolor

The biggest reason is that all our sins are ultimately against God who made us.

David recognized this in Psalm 51, against you, you only have I sinned.

But it's the impossibility of atoning for our own sins that is really the basis for our assurance of pardon. We can't pay, but God paid for us in Christ.

We can't forgive ourselves, but God forgives us in his Son.

We can't set things right, but Jesus rose from the grave to set things right in our hearts and ultimately in our bodies and in the whole creation.

We will have a chance one day to do things over and do them right.

So as usual, when we study David good and bad, come back to David's Son!