

2 Samuel 22:21-25

SI: A year ago I hit the pause button on our study of the life of King David.

The last sermon I preached was on 2 Samuel 7.

So we're going to pick up where we left off.

But I'm not going to preach on 2 Samuel 8 today.

Instead, I want us to turn to the end of 2 Samuel, to chapter 22,
and you'll see why in a minute.

At the end of 2 Samuel are two Psalms, written by David, that tell us in David's
own words how he evaluated his own life and kingship.

Let's read just four key verses, 22:21-25

The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;

according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.

For I have kept the ways of the LORD;

I have not done evil by turning from my God.

All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees.

I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.

INTRO: All of the believing men and women in the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus Christ in different ways.

You could say they are prototypes of Christ.

But David is the greatest of all the Old Testament prototypes.

Many of the ways we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior and relate to him are through our understanding of David.

Jesus was not a shepherd, he was a carpenter's son.

But we know Jesus and relate to him as our shepherd because David was a shepherd, and out of his experience, he wrote the 23rd Psalm.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . .”

Jesus was not a king in the common sense, he didn't wield a sword, he didn't lead armies into battle and conquer kingdoms.

But we worship Jesus as King and we sing *Crown Him With Many Crowns*

because David was a warrior king, and because David established the throne that Jesus Christ inherited.

So the significance of David to our experience of the Christian life is immense.

It's also worth noting that there are more chapters in the Bible about the life of David than any other person except Jesus himself.

Thirty-eight chapters about David.

By comparison, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph get about 12 each.

Also, we have David's many Psalms, which show his mind and his walk with God.

The Holy Spirit wanted us to have a long and thorough picture of David's life

The first half of David's life has a number of highlights.

Being anointed by Samuel

Killing Goliath.

Running from King Saul.

Becoming king over all of Israel

Bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.

Finally, God making a covenant with David and promising that his son will sit on his throne forever.

That's where I hit the pause button in our study, on that high note.

The first half of David's life is a positive, upward trajectory.

He had flaws and sins but none of them were so serious

that they hurt his move to the throne.

The second half of David's life, starts out on a very positive note.

He has tremendous military victories and expands Israel's influence.
He shows remarkable kindness and generosity to King Saul's grandson.
Israel appears to be heading for a golden age.
We'll read about those positive things in the next three weeks, chaps 8, 9, and 10.

But then there's a disaster.

David commits adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife.
And to cover up their affair and her pregnancy, he has Uriah killed.
The fallout from that sin tainted the rest of David's reign.
It paralyzed David and harmed his moral decision making.
Trouble after trouble piled up.
Great man as David was, he did not end well.

How does the Holy Spirit want us to read this story of moral failure so that we benefit from it spiritually and grow closer to Jesus Christ?
That's the question I want us to consider today, and I think these verses in chapter 22 are a key.

So let's look at this under three headings. I'll just call them . . .

The problem
The solution
The warning

MP#1 The problem

The problem of these verses is: How can David look at his life, especially the second half of his life, and say these things about himself?

Let me read it again:

The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.

For I have kept the ways of the LORD;

I have not done evil by turning from my God.

All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees.

I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.

How can he say that after the sin that devastated the latter years of his reign?

It wasn't just that he committed adultery and covered it up with murder.

As we will see, these sins paralyzed him morally so he started making one bad decision after another that ended up mangling his family and dividing kingdom.

One solution is to say that this is just David's way of talking about being forgiven. David is not actually saying that he lived a righteous and blameless life.

He's saying he's righteous and blameless because the Lord has forgiven his sins. That's certainly true, but not what David is saying here.

He doesn't use the language of sin and forgiveness and being washed clean.

David does use that language in some of his Psalms, in Psalm 51 for example, where he says very clearly that he is a sinner through and through and that the Lord has washed him and cleansed him.

But here he says I am blameless. I have lived a righteous life.

I have kept the way of the Lord. I have kept myself from sin.

Another possible solution is that maybe David wrote this Psalm early in his reign. Maybe he wrote it before he committed his terrible sins and before the moral decline that troubled the latter years of his life.

If that's so, then we can imagine David as an old man reading this Psalm and just shaking his head, embarrassed at his younger self.

How could I have been so self-righteous to say God rewarded my clean hands?

But that solution doesn't work either, because even if David did write this Psalm when he was younger, the author of 2 Samuel chose to use in this spot.

We don't know who wrote 2 Samuel, but he doesn't sweep anything under the rug. He rubs our noses in David's sins for 12 chapters. Then he uses this Psalm as a summary statement about David's life.

And furthermore, after David died, the Lord says to Solomon, David's son:
As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father.
The Lord himself says David walked with integrity of heart and uprightness, and that he did all God commanded and observed God's decrees and laws.

So we're back to the problem:

How can David say, under divine inspiration, that he has lived a righteous life and kept himself from sin and that God has rewarded him, when he committed such terrible sins that cast a shadow over his family and kingdom?

Well, if you think about it, this is not just a problem with David.

Do you remember Lot, Abraham's nephew?

Lot broke his relationship with his godly uncle and moved to Sodom for financial reasons. Living in that place had an evil influence on him and his wife and daughters. You can read the whole ugly story in Genesis 19.

But in the New Testament, in 2 Peter, Lot is called a righteous man.

Peter says that deep down Lot was distressed by the immorality around him and because of that God rescued him when he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

And what about Samson? You can't help but shake your head when you read Samson's life in the book of Judges. God calls and empowers him to save Israel. Samson does some heroic things and he also sports with prostitutes, makes foolish wagers, marries outside the faith, and gets snookered by his Philistine wife. And yet, did you notice his name in our reading this morning?

He's listed in Hebrews 11 as a man of faith alongside Abraham, Joseph, Moses. We could also mention Isaac and Gideon, both mentioned in Hebrews 11, both men who achieved great things for God and then did great damage by sins later in life.

The Bible is filled with people whose lives are a mixture of obedience to God and faithful service as well as serious, disgusting sin.

And in the life summary passages like 2 Sa 22, Heb 11 or 2 P 2 where God's word pronounces a verdict on their lives, that verdict is faithful, righteous, blameless!

So how are we supposed to reconcile these positive verdicts in the Bible with

the biblical record of their sins? Let's consider . . .

MP#2 The solution

Over the years I've read a lot of biographies of great Christians.

I've read Robert Tuttle's biography of John Wesley.

You know John Wesley, the founder of the Methodism.

Wesley treated his wife, Mary, with utter disregard.

He neglected her. He spent as much time away from her as possible.

He was a failure as a husband and the way he blamed his wife was appalling.

Wesley also brought spiritual life to a dying church and tens of thousands of people are in heaven today because of his profound love for God.

I've read Elisabeth Elliot's biography of Amy Carmichael several times. I love it.

Amy Carmichael, veteran missionary to India.

Amy could not handle criticism or even reasonable differences of opinion about mission work.

She thought God had spoken to her about the details so she would treat colleagues who disagreed with her as out of step with the will of God and then as basically dead to her. She cut contact with many good people.

Amy Carmichael also rescued hundreds of girls and boys from temple prostitution and built a safe community where they could know Jesus and experience love.

Our missionary Paul Billy Arnold told me about an elderly friend of his father who was a little orphan boy rescued by Amy Carmichael and a devout Christian.

Years ago for family devotions we read Don Richardson's biography of Stan Dale.

Stan Dale was a pioneer missionary to New Guinea.

Our kids were young, Adrienne was about 12 years old at the time and once after we had finished reading a chapter she said:

I don't like this man. I don't like Stan Dale.

And Allison and I had to chuckle because we agreed with her.

It wasn't a gross sin in his case, it was a very abrasive personality.

We could all tell this is not someone we would want to be with on mission field!

Yet Stan Dale, because of his profound gratitude for God

risked his life to take the Gospel into a very dark and dangerous place.

All of these Christian heroes had feet of clay and their lives, like David's, demonstrate two important things about God.

We need to remember these as we study the second half of David's life.

First, when you sin, even when you commit very bad sins,

God's transforming grace in your life is not cancelled.

It's not just that you don't lose your salvation. Of course that's true. Our status as saved people, justified through Christ, doesn't appear and disappear depending on our obedience or lack thereof. But 2 Samuel 22 points to a reality that is in some ways more amazing. God's transforming grace continues to work even when you commit gross sins. God continues to move you toward real righteousness and heartfelt obedience. His grace keeps the trajectory of your life aimed at him.

In spite of David's sins and repeated failures, his life was aimed toward God. So was Lot's and Samson's (hard to believe, but it's true, the Bible say so.). So was John Wesley's and Amy Carmichael's. Their sins didn't cancel God's transforming grace.

Second, when you sin, even when you commit very bad sins, God shows his mercy not only by forgiving you, but also by not nullifying your obedience. In other words, God doesn't say: You sinned, you committed a really bad sin, so I'm throwing out everything good you've ever done for me. It's all ruined to me. It's all tainted.

Do you remember the sex abuse scandal at Penn State several years ago? Remember how the NCAA declared that all the wins and championships under Joe Paterno are now officially erased from the record books? God doesn't do that to his people when they sin. Instead, in his great mercy, he considers your obedience and faith to be the defining characteristic of your life

For many chapters the Bible is going to rub our noses in David's selfishness, his lust, his self-pity, and his cowardice. But that same Bible is going to declare that the ultimate story of David's life is one of clean hands, righteousness, obedience, and blamelessness rewarded by God. In the end, God considers those things the defining characteristic of David's life.

So that's the solution to the perplexing verses—God's grace and mercy. But that leads us to one more consideration . . .

MP#2 The warning

What's the warning?

It's tempting to conclude from this that perhaps adultery isn't that bad after all.

Even arranging a murder didn't keep David from calling himself blameless, and on top of that David is forgiven and he's in heaven.

So maybe our sins aren't as big a deal to God as we sometimes make them out to be. But if you take David's words here as an invitation to disobey the Lord with impunity, you're making a terrible mistake.

First, you're forgetting the consequences of David's sins.

Because of God's grace and mercy, David could say he was a righteous man.

But David couldn't say his sins didn't hurt him.

I think you'll agree as we work our way through these chapters that carnage is not too strong a word for the latter half of David's life.

Four dead sons, a raped daughter, unhappy wives, a weakened kingdom.

I said a minute ago that the writer of 2 Samuel rubs our noses in it.

I think it's because he wants us to remember God requires his forgiven children to face the consequences of our sins.

Not all the consequences of our sins and not the consequence of all our sins.

Even in David's case, God mitigates the consequences.

He says to David, you will not die.

But even so, God allows his children to reap what we've sown.

We see this among Christians every day.

The Christian who mishandles his money, who does not pay his bills, who lives above his means, may come to see that he is wrong.

He may repent and ask God to forgive him and he will be forgiven.

But sometimes the hole is so deep that nothing but a miracle will save him from the shame and pain of foreclosure or bankruptcy.

Usually God does not perform a miracle, and allows him to reap what has sown.

So there's that reason for not taking sin lightly, the consequences.

And there's a deeper spiritual reason.

David never sinned because he knew he would be considered blameless anyway.

He never sinned because he knew God would forgive him.

He never used a theological argument to justify his sins.

No. Read Psalm 51. David admits he knew what he was doing was evil.

He knew he was offending God. His conscience was shouting at him.

And after he did it he shuddered at what he had done.

David fell into sin out of weakness, not high handed rebellion against God.

When a person justifies his sin with a theological argument—

I'll just ask forgiveness after I do it and God will forgive me.

I'm going to do it because I'm saved and I'll be going to heaven anyway.
God is sovereign, this is somehow his will, so he's going to work this out.
That's much more dangerous than falling into sin out of weakness because
it raises serious questions about whether that person is really a believer at all.

One of the Puritans said the fact that everyone sins
is the believer's bed of thorns and the hypocrite's bed of roses.

In other words, the hypocrite thinks:

Everybody is doing it, so it's not a big deal if I do it too.

The believer knows that everybody is doing it, but that makes it worse for him
when he does it, because he knows he's not everybody.

He's a child of God.

His love and loyalty to Christ make his sin deeply painful.

And the fact is that even though there are no sinless Christians, there multitudes of
Christians who out of love and loyalty to Christ haven't done what David did.

So you see, we have an astonishing Gospel truth in this passage.

A very sinful man is declared to be a law-keeping, clean, blameless man.

A very sinful man lives a God-focused life that is rewarded by God.

That's wonderful.

You may think your potential for the Lord's blessing has been stunted by
your sins, but it hasn't.

Sins and all, if you follow the Lord and strive to serve him, you can do great
things for him and his kingdom.

By God's grace and mercy you can say this about yourself:

The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.

For I have kept the ways of the LORD;

I have not done evil by turning from my God.

Understand that rightly. Apply it carefully.

Honor the Lord's grace with your love and loyalty.