

Session 5 David and Bathsheba

2 Sam 11 - The second most remembered story about David after his fight with Goliath.

Where did he go wrong? There's a vicious spiral of attitudes & behaviours that led to David's fall.

It starts in v1. Why didn't David go to war with his men? Tired of fighting and bloodshed? Desperate for a bit of 'me time'? His avoidance of what was expected of him opened the door to everything that followed.

Relevance for us: *How familiar does that sound? It's when we're tired, when we feel we deserve a break from what is expected of us, when we have nothing specific to occupy our thoughts, that we can be most vulnerable to the distractions and temptations of the world around us.*

What was he doing on his bed in the late afternoon?

Why didn't he avert his eyes when they chanced upon a woman bathing? He allowed his appreciation of her beauty to swell into lust for her body.

We're told nothing about Bathsheba's thoughts/feelings - the focus is on David's responsibility for what happened – he saw, he sent for, he slept with her.. All he could think about was having her for himself.

Relevance for us: *How often do we find ourselves driven by a desire to do something that we know deep down is wrong, but do not allow that knowledge to stop us from satisfying that desire? We've decided we must have what we desire. That we need it in order to cope with the other feelings going on inside us – our need for love, for being wanted, for being appreciated, for feeling good about ourselves, for not allowing others to get the better of us, for proving we're right and others are wrong, for relief from the stresses and struggles of everyday life.*

How frequently have you heard the phrase 'I couldn't help it'? That may be true for those who live their lives with no regard for God. They are slaves to their own passions. But it is not true for us as Christians. Christ has broken the power of sin that drags us further and further down its vicious spiral. We now have the Spirit of God within us to help us resist those temptations. We have a God who is eager and ready to help us choose the better way if only we will let Him.

David's actions had consequences - 'I am pregnant' (v5).

David could have brought an abrupt end to the vicious spiral down into greater sin. He could have called Uriah home from the battle front and confessed to him what he had done. But he didn't.

Uriah the Hittite was no stranger to David - but one of David's 'mighty men' (2 Sam 23:39; 1 Chr 11:41). (see also 2 Sam 11:3, 16:23 and 23:34 regarding Bathsheba's father & grandfather).

Relevance for us: *We may be attracted by all sorts of people we happen to see in daily life and on the screen. But we're most likely to entertain satisfying those feelings with people we know and meet day-to-day. We need to be on our guard most around the people we rub shoulders with.*

Contrast Uriah's attitude and actions with those of David. Uriah showed integrity and faithfulness to his fellow soldiers and to David's own policy that, when away from home, the men refrained from sex (1 Sam 21:5; see also Lev 15:18 & Deut 23:9-11,14). David failed to show the same level of faithfulness.

At this point David was in real jeopardy. If exposed his adultery was punishable by death.

So, we reach the most sordid part of the whole episode - the plan to get Uriah killed. Idleness had led to lust, lust to adultery, adultery to deception, and deception to conspiracy to commit murder.

Joab chose not to leave Uriah exposed and alone to be killed. Perhaps he was nervous about what the Israelite soldiers would think. Perhaps he didn't want to implicate himself in Uriah's death. Or perhaps he wanted to protect David from accusations that Uriah was deliberately allowed to die.

David was also nervous of what Joab would think and tried to placate Joab's anger by playing down the seriousness of what he'd done. The Hebrew in v25 means 'Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes.'

How has David, a man we've come to know as someone who knew the difference between good and evil, who turned to God frequently for a true perspective on weighty matters, ended up calling evil good.

David could've got away with it, with no witnesses or evidence to prove him to be in the wrong. But God knew and was not pleased (2 Sam 11:27).

Relevance for us: *We should remember that whatever we do, however much we might try to cover up our misdemeanours, God always sees and knows the truth. Nothing is hidden from him. We might initially find that thought scary, but it's actually the most reassuring, comforting thing you could imagine – as we will soon see in the case of David.*

God sent Nathan the prophet to bring David face to face with that realism - by telling a story (a typical approach in Middle Eastern culture cf Matt 21 and Lk 20).

Taking a poor man's only sheep to feed a guest would've been a gross betrayal of the high regard for hospitality in that culture.

David's declaration that the rich man deserved to die might sound excessive, but remember how David wanted to kill Nabal when he had refused to feed David and his men when on the run from Saul (1 Sam 25:1-22). David then revised the punishment to what the law required (Ex 22:1, see also Lk 19:8).

The reference to David being given Saul's wives (12:8) is a reminder David had many wives and concubines after he'd become king (2 Sam 5:13, see also 1 Chr 3:1-11). What was he doing with so many wives? Is this another weakness in David? (see Deut 17:17).

God would've given more, if he'd only asked (v8). Instead David had taken, without reference to God.

Compare Nathan's question (v9), 'Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?' with what David had said to Joab about the killing of Uriah (11:25 'Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes'). God was saying to David, 'It was evil in my eyes.' (Compare God's condemnation of David here with that of Saul in 1Sam 18:8).

David had not only despised the word of the LORD (the commandments) but also God himself (v10)

There would be serious consequences of David's actions. His household would pay for what he had taken and the penalty would match the crime (v11). Note again the reference to what can be seen with the eyes (see John 3:18 and Eph 5:11).

Relevance for us: *Much as we might want to avoid light being shone on the things we'd rather people didn't know about us, actually bringing them into the light is the best thing for us, because it is then that God is able to help us overcome them. So be grateful for the Nathans of this world who are bold enough to call us out when we stray from God's ways. Welcome the chance to repent of our godlessness and receive the Spirit's help in turning away from such ways.*

David's reaction (v13) was immediately to confess he had sinned against God and that was where his repentance and restoration needed to begin.

Relevance for us: *The same is true for us. Until we have acknowledged our actions or attitudes have been against what God requires of us, any attempt to reconcile with those we've harmed will either prove inadequate or beyond us.*

The road to redemption

This was the moment David's vicious spiral downwards into dark thoughts and deeds was abruptly halted, when his eyes at last turned back to God and his restoration could begin.

Psalms 51 expresses David's thoughts and feelings at this critical moment. What strikes you most?

Notice: accepts the desperateness of his sin; confident of God's cleansing; no sense of self-pity, or attempt to justify his actions. Just an admission of guilt and a desire for cleanliness and a pure heart.

Nathan confidently declared 'The LORD has taken away your sin' (12:13). The lawful punishment of death for adultery and murder would not apply. God's grace is big enough to cover even the worst of sins. God was willing to make David clean. The same was true for the people of Israel – and for us.

But because David's actions had shown utter contempt for the LORD, the child would die.

David pleaded with God for the child's life - with great seriousness - but the child still died. The servants thought David would take it badly – the Hebrew literally says 'he may do something evil.' But David got up and worshipped the LORD - even before he took any food. He accepted the boy's death as God's will and chose to move on in light of that. (cf Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane - Matt 26:39-42). It is a wise person who freely chooses to submit to the Father's will, rather than fight against it.

Relevance to us: *How do you deal with sin in your life? Is it with feelings of guilt, thoughts of self-pity or self-loathing, resignation to a life that falls short of what you wish it could be?*

Or is it with humility before God, a readiness to admit your weaknesses and need for God's help, confidence in God's amazing grace and forgiveness, and with genuine repentance and commitment to live differently?

Why did God continue to bless David after he had sinned so drastically?

Maybe because David not only admitted he'd sinned against God, but also quickly sought to change his behaviour thereafter. God found David to be someone with whom he could continue to work.

Relevance for us: *Had we messed up as David did, some of us might have been so devastated by our personal failures that we could never forgive ourselves or believe that God could forgive us ever again. Some might have sought ways to justify their behaviour and so drifted further and further away from God's ways. But David was eager to seek after God and return to the right path as soon as possible after becoming aware of his sin. We would do well to imitate him.*

David's life from then on was not all blessing. His family life became a source of stress and pain to him. The subsequent actions of his son Absalom owed much to the failures he'd observed in his father.

Relevance for us: *Our actions have consequences and, while we know that God's forgiveness is complete and his restoration of us is unbounded when we turn back to Him, we cannot expect to so easily escape from the impact of those consequences. They act as a continuing reminder of our need for God.*

But God also continued to work through David because He'd determined, long before Israel became a nation, that His purposes for the world would be fulfilled through Abraham and his descendants.

Relevance for us: *God often rebuked Israel and disciplined them and urged them to repent and return to Him. God will not ignore sin, but He also will not allow sin to prevent what He has already purposed and through whomever he chooses. See Romans 9.*

That God continues to work through people even when they fail spectacularly points us to the simple truth that this life is far more about what God can and does do than about our own achievements and failures.