

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13 You Are the One

The news about sin is good news. Think of it like a medical diagnosis. If there is pain and the cause is unknown, then the remedy will also be unknown. The level of anxiety will be high. Once the cause has been named, a plan for a remedy can be made, one can anticipate a return to health. A sense of calm is restored. Healing begins with the diagnosis; at least the emotional and physical healing.

It is the same with sin. Once the reality of sin has been accepted in a person's life, and also the reality of grace, then anxiety eases, reparations are made, forgiveness and reconciliation happen.

From time-to-time it is helpful to talk about sin, just simply so we can be reminded of it and how it works. There is perhaps no better story in the Bible to serve as an illustration than that of David and Uriah's wife Bathsheba. It is a sordid tale.

David and Bathsheba

David, of course, the slayer of giants, became King of Israel after the failures of Saul, the first Israelite king. With his military exploits and his personality and talent, and faith, he became Israel's most successful leader. With power came temptation. With temptation came corruption.

David became infatuated with Bathsheba, who was one of his subjects. Both of them were married, she to a soldier in the army name Uriah. Because he was the king, he was able to arrange to make her his wife. And that is what he did. Thus he added adultery to covetousness. When he then sent her husband to the front lines of the hottest battle where the fatality rates were high and he was killed, He added murder to covetousness and adultery.

Nathan

This set of sins was the result of an extra-ordinary abuse of power and it set in motion a series of destructive consequences, that cannot be avoided just by refusing to talk about them.

It fell to the prophet Nathan to tell David the news about his sinfulness so that David could be healed and restored. The conversation between the two represents an extreme example of telling truth to power, as we sometimes call it. Nathan approached his task by telling David a story.

There was a wealthy man who had many flocks and herds. When guests arrive it was customary for the host to provide a meal. Thus this wealthy man was imposed upon, or at least the way it is described, he considered it an imposition.

There was a neighbor down the street who lived a much more modest life and only had one lamb. When the time for the meal came, the wealthy person went down the street to his modest neighbor and took *his* lamb and had it prepared for the feast

That is how the story went. And it is good to understand that there really wasn't a man who took his neighbor's lamb, Nathan was talking about David taking Uriah's wife. This wasn't just an adultery, it was the rich and powerful stealing from the poor.

When David heard the prophet's story, he became angry at the injustice of it all,

“As surely as the Lord lives this man who did this deserves to die. He must pay back for that lamb four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

And then the crucial part of the story, “You are the one,” Nathan told David. And of course David knew that Nathan was right. It is good for each of us to sit in David's chair from time-to-time, and be reminded of our own sinfulness. Though we are not rich and powerful like David we are still guilty of sin, and any attempt to escape is futile.

While it is possible to identify with Nathan or the person who confronts the wrongdoer, it is best not to. I am sure Nathan was sinful too. It is better for each of

us to reflect upon our own sin. Before we move to the other part of the gospel message, we should take a look at the consequences of David's sin.

The Aftermath

One of the misconceptions about forgiveness is that it somehow undoes the consequences. This, at least, was not the case for David. The affect of his adultery was widespread and lasted throughout his life. It negatively affected his relationships with his sons and other wives. There was constant palace intrigue. His losses were great.

Of course, the inner life is most affected by sin when it occurs, and it has affects that cannot be avoided by running away, or by stubbornly resisting, or any rationalization. Sin works its power privately as well as publicly.

The healing of the inner life is the main miracle of redemption, and though ultimately death and estrangement from God are avoided. In the earthly life, things do not work out that way.

In either case the light of day is necessary. For David, Nathan brought the light of day. It was an intervention of sorts. The proclaiming of sin by the church and its preachers and teachers *is* such an intervention, *is* the light of day.

The proclaiming of sin - saying, "you are the one," to each person, is not done as a tool to inflict harm. It is not a club to beat people over the head with, bringing a sense of guilt. It is not meant as a tool for manipulation. If it has been used that way, it is regrettable.

Rather, it is gospel news, it paves the way for the healing of the soul and for reconciliation with God and one another. It may be a sad confession at first, but in the end it is a liberation.

One of the great sources of anxiety in human life is caused by guilt. One feels guilty because of two things - two facets of the human condition. First there is the compulsion to do and to be good. It is the sense we all have at some level that there is a standard that measures the distance between right and wrong, good and evil, and that each of us should make a strenuous attempt to meet the standard, to be on the good side of it. This sense is carried as a burden throughout life.

The second reality is the failure to meet the standard. Frankly, no one is that good. The burden is too heavy. Any attempt to avoid the second reality fails. Sin work's in a person's inner life without permission and is untreatable if one is in a state of denial about it. It causes crazy distortions, one of which, ironically, is hyper-judgmentalism, a spiritual phariseeism.

But grace is greater than sin and its affects. It begins with confession, or else when someone gives us grace by doing the Nathan, pointing the finger not to condemn, but to inform, "you are the one."

We all know the truthfulness of this statement. We also know the truthfulness of Christ's sacrifice. The greatest irony is that with acknowledgment and confession of sin comes release, the burden is lifted. One is free to live and love and serve, even as David was restored, so shall it be for us.

Amen

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