



Please turn in your copy of God's word to 2 Samuel 11 (page 244, pew Bible). I have thoroughly enjoyed our series on *The Life of David*, whom the Lord described as "a man after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). So far, we have witnessed some of David's greatest qualities. Early on we witnessed his *courage* in the account of David and Goliath. More recently we were moved by his *kindness* in the account of David and Mephibosheth.

But today we come to a chapter that I wish I didn't have to preach. I could almost wish it weren't in Scripture. I wish it had never happened. And that is the account of David and Bathsheba. Here we see not David's courage or his kindness or any other commendable quality, but David's corruption. In fact, if it weren't God himself telling us this story in Scripture, it would be nearly impossible for us to believe that David's acts of adultery and murder had ever happened. But they did happen, and they have been recorded in Scripture for our benefit. "All Scripture," including 2 Samuel 11, "is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Let us first read this account in its entirety so that we capture the flow of the story. Plus, there is something powerful about reading Scripture without comment. Moments ago we sang, "Speak, O Lord." So, now let us listen as the Lord speaks to us through his word.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.³ And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"⁴ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house.⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

⁶ So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David.⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going.⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king.⁹ But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house.¹⁰ When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?"¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field.

Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.”¹² Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

¹⁵ In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.” ¹⁶ And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men.¹⁷ And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. ¹⁸ Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. ¹⁹ And he instructed the messenger, “When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king,²⁰ then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, ‘Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? ²¹ Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?’ then you shall say, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.’”

²² So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. ²³ The messenger said to David, “The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. ²⁴ Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.”

²⁵ David said to the messenger, “Thus shall you say to Joab, ‘Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.’ And encourage him.”

²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

- 2 Samuel 11:1-27

If we could distill the lesson of this narrative into a single sentence, it would be this:

***The godliest saint is still susceptible
to the most grievous sins.***

When reading this account, it's easy for us to think, “How could David do such a thing?” But that question should not be asked rhetorically as if we're making a statement of disgust. It should be asked sincerely, looking inwardly, with a desire to discover our own susceptibility to sin so that we might be aware of it and be on our guard against it.

**The Context
(vv. 1-2)**

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem” (v. 1). Throughout this account the narrator employs multiple uses of irony, starting here in verse one. Do you see it? While David’s armies are off besieging Rabbah, David is at home being conquered by sin.

There’s also a note of irony in the word *sent*. David stayed home and “**sent** Joab, and his servants ... and all Israel” off to war. In the two previous chapters, David “sent” to show kindness:

- David “sent” and brought Mephibosheth from “Lo-debar” to Jerusalem.
- David “sent” a delegation to express condolences to Hanun when his father died.
- David “sent” servants to Jericho to care for his men who had been mistreated.

In each situation, David “sent” to show kindness to others. But every time David “sends” in this chapter, it’s not to show kindness but to serve himself. So, instead of going out to battle, David stayed home and “sent” everyone else. While David’s men are out risking their lives, he’s home lounging around.

Whenever we’re not doing what we’re supposed to be doing, we’re more susceptible to sin.¹ Verse 2: “It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.” The Hebrew text is more explicit, saying, “the woman [was] beautiful in appearance, very.” Kent Hughes describes the scene and the temptation that took hold of David’s heart as he gazed on Bathsheba:

She was young, in the flower of life, and the evening shadows made her even more enticing. The king looked at her . . . And he continued to look. After the first glance David should have turned the other way ... but he did not. His *look* became a *sinful stare* and then a burning libidinous sweaty *leer*. In that moment David, who had been a man after God’s own heart, became a dirty, leering old man. . . . The longer King David leered, the less real God became to him. Not only was his awareness of God diminished, but David lost awareness of who himself was – his holy call, his frailty, and the certain consequences of sin. This is what lust does! It has done it millions of times. God disappears to lust-glazed eyes.²

Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed that when lust takes control, “Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.”³ With his men off at war, David thought he was safe. But he was in grave danger and didn’t know it. When attacked by temptation, he was totally unprepared. He was caught off guard and was quickly conquered by sin. “A lustful fixation came over him that would not be denied.”⁴

The Crime (vv. 3-4)

¹ Matthew Henry wrote, “When we are out of the way of our duty, we are in the way of temptation.”

² R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), pp. 24-25.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

³ And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” ⁴ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house.
- 2 Samuel 11:3-4

Twice David “sent” – first to *inquire* about the woman and then to *take* her. There is no kindness here. David is driven by lust, not love. Walter Brueggemann captures the tone of the text, saying,

The action is quick. The verbs rush as the passion of David rushed. He sent; he took; he lay (v. 4). The royal deed of self-indulgence does not take very long. ... There is nothing but action. There is no conversation. There is no hint of caring, of affection, of love – only lust. David does not call her by name, does not even speak to her. At the end of the encounter, she is only “the woman.”⁵

Verse 5: “And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, ‘I am pregnant.’” The text is loaded with irony. First, Bathsheba’s “careful observance of the ceremonial law (cleansing herself after her period) is followed by blatant transgression of the moral law (David’s adultery with her).”⁶ Furthermore, after David “sent” for Bathsheba and lay with her, Bathsheba “sent and told David, ‘I am pregnant.’” Third, while David talks quite a bit in this chapter, Bathsheba’s lines are limited to “I am pregnant” (v. 5) – just two words in Hebrew.⁷ The narrator doesn’t “clarify whether Bathsheba was baiting David, nor whether she considered the fling with the king an honor. The emphasis is on David and his deed.”⁸ The narrator is keeping the spotlight on David, which is where our attention needs to be.

Having committed adultery, David then tries to *cover up* his sin instead of confessing it.

The Coverup (vv. 5-25)

Plan A (vv. 6-11)

“So David sent word to Joab, ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite’ And Joab sent Uriah to David” (v. 6). There’s that word “send/sent” again – three times in a single verse! David is using (or *abusing*) his power to control the situation.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 274. Cited by Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, reprinted 2018), p. 142.

⁶ Davis, 139-140.

⁷ Bathsheba’s brief message carries massive implications. She had been purifying herself from her period, which means (1) she had not been pregnant prior to intercourse with David; (2) intercourse with David had taken place at the most opportune time for conception; (3) since Uriah is away at the battlefield, he can’t possibly be the father!” Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, The NIV Application Commentary, gen. ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2003), p. 528.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

When Uriah comes to David, David asks, “How’s Joab? How are the people doing? How’s the war going?” In the previous chapter, when David showed kindness to King Hanun of the Ammonites, they thought his kindness was a ruse, but they were wrong. But now, David’s kindness to Uriah *is* a ruse, an attempt to cover up his sin. After David asks how everyone is doing, he says to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” Take the night off, enjoy the comforts of home, have sex with your wife! Of course, David didn’t say those exact words, but that’s what they imply. Verse 4 says that after David lay with Bathsheba, “she returned to her house.” Now he tells Uriah, “go down to your house,” *where Bathsheba is*. Likewise, the word “wash” in verse 8 is the same Hebrew word translated “bathing” in verse 2. “What David wanted Uriah to do (“wash”) is just what David had seen [Bathsheba doing] from his roof....”⁹ David even sends a gift after him.

But David’s ploy doesn’t work. Verses 9-11:

⁹ But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰ When they told David, “Uriah did not go down to his house,” David said to Uriah, “Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?” ¹¹ Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.”
- 2 Samuel 11:6-11

This is the only time Uriah speaks, and his words should have pierced David’s heart. Bill Arnold writes, “

The great irony of our text is that this [foreign] convert is more righteous than the Israelite king. Uriah, “the Hittite”¹⁰ is a man of such character that he ... adamantly refuses to compromise his commitments Yahweh’s war against Ammon or to his fellow soldiers. Yet King David, the anointed one of Yahweh, has abused his God-given power and attempts to manipulate a faithful and righteous servant in a desperate scam to save himself.¹¹

Plan B (vv. 12-13)

¹² Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

- 2 Samuel 11:12-13

⁹ “The narrator allows us (for a moment) to share David’s perspective. Verse 9 begins literally, ‘And Uriah lay . . .’ This is an exact echo of verse 4: ‘and he [David] lay with her [Bathsheba].’! For a moment we are led to expect (as David hoped) that Uriah did what David had done. . . . But immediately we hear that Uriah ‘lay’ not with his wife but ‘at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house’ (v. 9). Woodhouse, *2 Samuel*, 297-298.

¹⁰ As he is labeled seven times in the text – 2 Sam. 11:3, 6, 17, 21, 24; 12:9, 10 (see also 23:39).

¹¹ Arnold, 527.

Plan B didn't work either. It's been well said that "at this time in the king's life, Uriah was a better man drunk than David was sober."¹²

Plan C (vv. 14-25)

"In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah" (v. 14). Once again David "sent" – this time Uriah's death warrant by his own hand, knowing he is too trustworthy to open the sealed letter. *How cruel is that?* But that's how sin works when we try to cover it up instead of confessing it. It only leads to more sin. Not only that, but each new step of deceit becomes easier because our heart becomes harder.

David's heart is so hardened by this point, that when the messenger from Joab tells him that the enemy gained an advantage over the men of Israel and that some of them died, including Uriah, David says, "Oh, well. You win some, you lose some. The sword devours this one today and that one tomorrow. Strengthen your assault on the city and destroy it." David, the man whose conscience had struck him when he cut off a corner of the king's robe, was now so calloused that "he trivializes the deaths" of his most devoted servants, including Uriah the Hittite, "that [David] himself had caused."¹³

The Commentary (vv. 26-27)

²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

- 2 Samuel 11:26-27

This is the last time David *sends*. Having achieved his plan, David makes his final move. Perhaps "Plan C" was the best plan after all. Not only did David cover up his sin, but now with Uriah out of the way, David can have Bathsheba all to himself. And since the cover-up so quickly followed the crime, no one will second-guess the timing of her pregnancy.

Now David can breathe easy. He's got everything under control. Or so he thinks. From David's perspective, this is the end of the matter. But from God's standpoint, this ordeal is far from over. It started with David and Bathsheba, but it ends with David and God. David "sent" for Bathsheba, thinking he had concealed his sin. But the very next verse (12:1) says, "And the Lord *sent* Nathan to David" (2 Sam. 12:1). Why? To *confront* his sin – for "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Sam. 11:27), literally, "was evil in the sight of the Lord." Until now, the narrator has detailed every step of the story as if God was nowhere involved. But this only serves to accentuate the lone statement at the end of the chapter: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." This goes to show that "the silence of God does not indicate the absence of God."¹⁴

¹² Hughes, 26.

¹³ Arnold, 530.

¹⁴ Davis, 146.

Conclusion

We'll continue this account next week in chapter 12 where David is confronted about his sin and must face the consequences of his sin. But in chapter 11 we find at least five realities to consider as we contemplate this text:

1. Our inclination toward laxity.

Like David, we can become slack in our spiritual responsibilities. We stop fighting the good fight and begin resting on our laurels. We look at how far we've come, how much we have accomplished, and now we can take it easy.

Scripture warns against laziness. The whole book of Hebrews is dedicated to this theme. A couple of days ago my wife said, "Just like a grocery cart with a bad wheel pulls to the side, we're naturally prone to laxity. We will naturally drift unless we determine not to."

We're all prone to grow lax in our spiritual life. In his inaugural address, President JFK's historic words, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country," could also be applied to the church. *Have you grown lax in your Christian life? Do you expect other people to serve you, or do you look for ways to serve others?*

2. Our obsession with sex.

"An idle mind is the devil's playground," and that is certainly true when it comes to sex. Do we really need to convince ourselves that this is true? One in five mobile searches are for pornography. At least one in four teens are involved in sexting. By the time they're 20 years old, 77% of individuals have had sex, and 75% have had sex before marriage.

In his book, *Strange New World*, Carl Trueman states, "the idea that human flourishing is virtually synonymous with sexual fulfillment is a commonplace – in fact, virtually an intuition – of modern Western culture. The fulfilled life is a sexually fulfilled life."¹⁵ Yet as the pornography industry grows with each new advance in technology, and as the homosexual and transexual sub-culture expands, our culture falls deeper into the clutches of the same ancient lie that seduced David. Bill Arnold writes,

David surrenders impulsively to his most basic instincts, which lead him down a path that grows darker with each step. Rather than reaching his highest level of personal fulfillment, David discovers the darkness of his own soul.¹⁶

Likewise, our obsession with sex leads to our self-destruction. That's another reason why the message of 2 Samuel 11-12 is "as pertinent and necessary today as ever."¹⁷

3. Our Abuse of Power

¹⁵ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), p. 74.

¹⁶ Arnold, 545.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Abuse of power takes on many forms – physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and psychological. We all tend to abuse power in our interpersonal relationships. We can even try to manipulate God. Yet “our greedy attempts to control and manipulate lead only to pain and loss.”¹⁸ This tragic episode in David’s life teaches us to guard our relationships carefully and to use power to minister to others, not to manipulate them.

4. Our Accountability to God

David thought he had concealed his sin. But God saw everything and dealt with David accordingly. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Moses told the people of Israel, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23). David knew this Scripture yet somehow thought that he would be the exception – that he would get away with his sin. But the nature of sin is that, whether or not others discover your sin, your sin will discover you. You cannot run from sin’s consequences. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10).

5. Our Hope in Christ

David was a man after God’s own start. He was the gold standard by which every other king in Israel would be measured. Yet even as Israel’s greatest king, David fell greatly. “The thing that David had done displeased the Lord” (2 Sam. 11:27). But God looked at King David’s greater descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, and declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17 NIV). Peter, who was an eye-witness of Jesus’ life, testified, “He never sinned, nor deceived anyone” (1 Peter 2:22 NLT). That’s why Christ alone is the perfect King. He saved us by living a perfect life for us, by taking the punishment we deserve for our sin and deception, and by rising victoriously from the dead, proving that he had conquered sin and death for all who put their trust in him.

This means we can *come to God as we are* – with all our sins, our deceit, our obsessions, our abuse of power, our guilt, our shame – and be fully forgiven by the God who not only sees our sin but mercifully saves us from it.

¹⁸ Ibid.