



Please open your Bibles to 2 Samuel 12 (page 245, pew Bible). We haven't gotten to the last words of David as far as our sermon series goes, but we'll get there eventually. These beautiful words that our choir just sang are recorded in 2 Samuel 23. They're not the last words David ever spoke but are his final public address to the people of Israel. David says that "the one who rules justly is like the early morning sun, which brings new life and vitality."¹ David was a noble king in this regard, but he was by no means a perfect king. The tragic narrative of 2 Samuel 11 shows that *the best men are still susceptible to the worst sins*.

So, in his final words, David looks not at the past but at what God will do in the future. God will raise up one of David's descendants who will rule in perfect righteousness, and God will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. David's final words are fulfilled in Jesus. In his humanity he is the descendant of David. In his divinity he is the eternal Son of God. He is the King of kings we worship today. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, "we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son."

This grace is glorious because it is greater than our sins – even the very worst of sins. In 2 Samuel 12, God pours out his grace on David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah. We stand in need of God's grace as well, for David's sins in 2 Samuel 11 and what led to them hold up a mirror to our own lives. *Who among us has not grown lax in our spiritual life? Who among us has not caved into temptation? Who among us has not tried to conceal our sin through lying and other acts of deception? Who among us hasn't tried to manipulate people for to suit our own selfish purposes?* In one way or another we've all been in David's shoes. That's what makes God dealing with David in 2 Samuel 12 so relevant to our lives. We also stand in desperate need of God's grace. Thankfully, *God loves his children too much to leave us in our sin*.

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This is evident from the first verse of chapter 12 and sets in motion every other measure of grace that follows. God's grace *pursues* David. It brings him *pain* as David is forced to see his sin and to suffer the consequences, but God's grace also provides *pardon* for David's sin and the *power* to put his past behind him, get a fresh start, and experience the blessings of God in his life.

This grace is available for you and for me. That's why God put this story in Scripture – to instruct and encourage us as we grapple with our own sins and failures.

¹ John D. Currid, "2 Samuel," NIV Zondervan Study Bible, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), p. 586.

Pursuing Grace (vv. 1-9)

“And the Lord sent Nathan to David” (1 Sam. 12:1a). The word “sent” appears twelve times in chapter 11.² The majority of the time David is the one “sending,” and every time David sends, it’s to suit his own sinful purposes. David sends for Bathsheba to commit adultery with her. Then he sends her husband Uriah out to die in battle. Then David sends for Bathsheba again to make her his wife.

That’s the last time David sends, and we’re told at the end of the chapter, “the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” And in the next verse, the first verse of chapter 12, “the Lord sent Nathan to David.” When we sin, God is not a passive onlooker.³ The Lord not only *sees*, he *sends*. This shows that God is ultimately in control and even the most powerful kings are accountable to him. But it also shows that God loves David too much to leave him in his sin. So, God sends Nathan, David’s close friend, to confront him.

He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” ⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die,⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” ⁷ Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸ And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

- 2 Samuel 12:1-9

One of the king’s duties was to administer justice.⁴ As Nathan told David of this atrocity that had taken place, David became enraged at the rich man’s ruthlessness – having no idea that Nathan was talking about him! By the time Nathan says, “You are the man,” David has already judged himself worthy of death. David even invokes God’s name, saying, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die.”

² Vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 [3 times], 12, 14, 18, 22, 27.

³ 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. 149.

⁴ As the judges in Israel had done before there was any king – 1 Sam. 7:15-17; cf. 2 Sam. 8:15.

It's much easier to recognize other people's sins than our own. David rightly insists that the rich man repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole, for that is what the Law required (see Exodus 22:1). But David pronounces that sentence only after he has condemned the rich man to death. Stealing and killing another man's sheep was not a capital crime, but David sentences the rich man to death anyway. Why? Because in this instance the crime was especially cruel and heartless. The rich man who had everything took the one precious possession of the poor man who otherwise had nothing.

David was enraged, and rightly so. Nathan had David right where he and God wanted him. The Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte wrote, "Nathan's sword was within an inch of David's conscience before David knew that Nathan had a sword."⁵ As soon as David delivers the verdict, Nathan plunges the truth into his heart: "*You are the man!*"

"Thus says the Lord: 'I anointed you king, I delivered you from Saul, I gave you his house and his wives. I gave you the house of all Israel and Judah, and if that were not enough, I would have given you more. Why, then, have you despised my word and done this horrible deed?' By despising my word, you have despised me." To despise God's word is to disregard it, to act as if it doesn't matter, not worthy of your consideration. Showing contempt for God's word is the core sin from which every other sin sprouts.

Verse 9 specifies David's sins but with an emphasis on the people he hurt. The Hebrew text shows this emphasis by placing the direct objects – the people – before the verbs:⁶

- *Uriah the Hittite* you struck down with the sword.
- *His wife* you took as your own wife.
- But *him* you killed with the sword of the Ammonites.

In this way the text emphasizes that David had not only *despised the word of the Lord* but had also *destroyed people*. These were serious sins that would bring serious consequences.

Painful Grace (vv. 10-15)

"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife."
¹¹ Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" ¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die." ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

- 2 Sam. 12:10-15

⁵ Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1952), 245. Cited by Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Story of Passion and Destiny* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 203.

⁶ Davis, 151.

I can't imagine how difficult it must have been for Nathan to deliver this message to his dear friend David. But true friends will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. Scripture says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend..." (Prov. 27:6). Sometimes the truth hurts, and in this case, it was especially hard for David to hear the devastating consequences of his sin.

Scripture makes it clear that God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13), but God is sovereign over sin and uses it to accomplish his holy purpose. Such was the case with the sins that would arise in David's family. Those committing these sins would be held accountable, but God would use their sins for a holy purpose – to discipline David and to warn us about the serious consequences of disregarding God's word.

The severest consequence, in terms of the immediate future and its emotional impact, was the imminent death of David's newborn son. That's a hard pill to swallow. What are we to make of an innocent child dying instead of his guilty father? It 's natural for us to be greatly troubled by such a thought, and there are no easy answers.

Thirty years ago when I was pastoring students in Virginia, I had a young married couple serving on our volunteer youth staff. They loved the Lord and were devoted servants. In fact, the Lord ended up calling them into full-time ministry. But they conceived their first child before they got married. They knew they had sinned by engaging in premarital sex and were clearly repentant. But after their baby was born, they lived in constant fear that the Lord might take her from them as a consequence of their sin. Their fear was based on their knowledge of what happened to David's son. They went to the senior pastor for counseling. I don't know that he said, but it seemed to help.

I'll say more about the death of David's son in a few moments, but for now let us be mindful of a couple of things:

1. Scripture makes it clear that there is no unrighteousness with God, no matter what he decides to do in a given situation (Rom. 9:14; cf. Ps. 92:15; Gen. 18:25).
2. It's also clear in 2 Samuel 12 that God's purpose in the death of David's son was to discipline David not to punish his child, per se. In fact, David's son was spared from all the evils that David's other children perpetrated on one another, including rape and murder.

The Lord's discipline, as severe as it may be, is still a demonstration of his grace. The author of Hebrews reminds us of what Solomon, the second son born to David and Bathsheba, wrote to his son – words that are recorded in Proverbs 3:11-12:

Do not despise the Lord's instruction, my son,
and do not loathe his discipline;
for the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights.

- Proverbs 3:11-12 CSB

After quoting these words from Solomon, the author of Hebrews goes on to say,

No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

- Hebrews 12:11 CSB

King David's last words, sung earlier by our choir, shows that he had been "trained by the peaceful fruit of righteousness." Listen again to his words:

³ The God of Israel spoke;
 the Rock of Israel said to me,
 "The one who rules the people with justice,
 who rules in the fear of God,
⁴ is like the morning light when the sun rises
 on a cloudless morning,
 the glisten of rain on sprouting grass."
⁵ Is it not true my house is with God?
 For he has established a permanent covenant with me,
 ordered and secured in every detail.
 Will he not bring about
 my whole salvation and my every desire?

- 2 Samuel 23:3-5 CSB

Such is the peace of one who has been trained in the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

But what if God in his grace had not pursued David? What if God had left him in his sin? David would not have known such peace. In fact, David got more than peace. He got pardon.

Pardoning Grace (vv. 13-14)

Look again at verses 13-14: "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.'"

According to the Law, David deserved death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). But he received mercy and forgiveness instead.

Consider first his confession. Notice how simple it was. "I have sinned against the Lord." Given the seriousness of David's sins, shouldn't he have said more? Shouldn't he have groveled before God a bit, wallowing in his guilt and pleading multiple times for pardon?

Isn't that what we do sometimes? We should know better, but we're still inclined to act as if the intensity of our repentance contributes to our atonement.⁷ Yet, in the classic hymn *Rock of Ages*, Augustus Toplady rightly testifies to the Lord,

*Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow,
 All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and thou alone.*

⁷ Davis, 155.

Perhaps it was good that David didn't say more. He doesn't attempt to excuse his sin or minimize it or shift the blame, at least partly, on to someone else. He calls sin what it is and takes full responsibility: "I have sinned against the Lord." Now, we know that David did eventually say more, for he wrote Psalm 51 "after Nathan the prophet went to him" and confronted him. "Perhaps it was that same evening that David wrote Psalm 51,"⁸ in which he poured out his heart to the Lord, expanding on his simple confession here.

David deserves death, but he receives grace instead. But this grace was costly. David would not die, but a death would occur. The child to be born to David would die. It's as if the child is David's substitute. Dale Davis wrote,

I do not intend to read New Testament meanings back into an Old Testament text. I only want readers to note the pattern here, for there are some of us who know this paradox of forgiveness that is both free and costly, because a son of David has been our substitute.⁹

Yes, Jesus bore our sins in his own body on the cross, taking the death penalty that we deserved, so that we could be forgiven instead of condemned. The German hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt understood the significance of substitutionary atonement when he wrote,

*What thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinner's gain.
Mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve thy place.
Look on me with thy favor, and grant to me thy grace.*

That's the grace that David received – grace that is greater than all our sin. This same pardoning grace is available to you if you will confess your sin and call on Christ to save you. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

God's grace not only pardons us, but it also provides the power needed to change us.

Powerful Grace (vv. 15-31)

Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of life. In the previous chapter, David was completely consumed with himself and his own sinful impulses. But he is now a changed man.

a. His concern for his child (vv. 15b-23)

And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. ¹⁶David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. ¹⁷And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food

⁸ Swindoll, 204.

⁹ Ibid., 157.

with them. ¹⁸ On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, “Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm.” ¹⁹ But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” They said, “He is dead.” ²⁰ Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. ²¹ Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” ²² He said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ ²³ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.”

- 2 Samuel 12:15-23

David is so concerned for his son that he doesn't eat but gives himself to relentless intercession, lying on the ground all night and begging God to spare his son. David's concern is so intense that when the child does die, David's servants are afraid that he might do himself harm.

God doesn't grant David's plea, but it was still right for David to pray this way, because he knows that showing grace is God's forte.¹⁰ “You see, David does not merely have a grip on grace; grace has gripped him.”¹¹ David knows that because of God's grace, David will one day go to his child, even though his child will not return to him.

b. His compassion for his wife (vv. 24-25)

“Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:24-25). For the first time, David began to treat Bathsheba as his wife: he “comforted” her. There had been no mention of comfort from David when Bathsheba had mourned the death of her husband Uriah. But now “David comforted his wife.”¹²

Think about this: David had confessed his sin – not only to Nathan but also to every person who would ever read Psalm 51. Surely by now Bathsheba knew that David had orchestrated her first husband's death and that David was responsible for the death of their baby boy. “How is it possible for *this* man to be a *comfort* to his wife? How could that happen? It was a miracle of grace.”¹³ That's the only way that David's marriage to Bathsheba could be unaffected by David's sin.

¹⁰ Davis, 158.

¹¹ Ibid., 159.

¹² John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, Preaching the Word, series editor R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 335.

¹³ Ibid.

Not only was their marriage unbroken, but God also blessed them with another son. David named him Solomon, which means “peace.” And the Lord loved him and wanted David to know that, so he sent him a message by Nathan the prophet. I’m sure that this gave Nathan great joy, especially since his previous confrontation with David had been so difficult for him as his friend. After receiving this wonderful message from Nathan, David gave his son a second name, “Jedidiah, because of the Lord.” Jedidiah means “beloved of the Lord.” Beautiful, bountiful grace!

But it didn’t stop there. God revealed his powerful grace not only by producing positive change in David and blessing his family, but also by giving David victory over his enemies.

c. His conquest over his enemies (vv. 26-31)

²⁶ Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and took the royal city. ²⁷ And Joab sent messengers to David and said, “I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters.” ²⁸ Now then gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called by my name.” ²⁹ So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah and fought against it and took it. ³⁰ And he took the crown of their king from his head. The weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone, and it was placed on David’s head. And he brought out the spoil of the city, a very great amount. ³¹ And he brought out the people who were in it and set them to labor with saws and iron picks and iron axes and made them toil at the brick kilns. And thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

- 2 Samuel 12:26-31

Joab did the lion’s share of the work, but David was honored for the victory. In the same way, the spiritual battles that we win are the Lord’s doing, not ours, but God in his grace will still reward us with the crown of glory. Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace! Grace in the face of our sin!

Conclusion

Could it be that God in his grace is pursuing you? You’re living in sin, and you know it. You have disregarded God’s word, you have lived to please yourself, and you have hurt other people in the process. You deserve judgment, not mercy.

But mercy is God’s specialty. Grace is his gift to undeserving sinners like you and me. God’s grace is by no means cheap. It cost him the life of his one and only Son, whom he gave to show his love to the world. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).

Have you received God’s free gift of salvation by trusting in his Son Jesus to save you? You can do that right now where you are seated. Admit to God that you are a sinner, that you have despised his word, and that you deserve judgment. Believe that Jesus died and rose again to save you. Confess him as your Lord and live accordingly.

Even as Christians, we constantly battle temptation and quite often lose the fight. That's why we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day – because we stand in need of God's grace every day. The gospel reminds us of our utter dependence upon God. It protects us from pride. It keeps us from despair. It evokes praise and thanks to God for his grace. It motivates us to love and good works and to share the gospel with those who are lost in sin and have yet to experience God's amazing grace. It reminds us that true freedom is found in Christ. He alone gives us a clean heart and a fresh start.