

# 2 Samuel 11: 1-15, 26,27

## David: the Triumph and Tragedy of a Leader

### SHAME

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Today we have heard a story full of intrigue and deception, that plumbs the depths of human evil. There are basically three sins highlighted for us in this story. Did you pick them? Yes, adultery is pretty obvious, and murder. But what is the third sin? It is always unseen and seemingly innocuous. It's the breaking of the 10th Commandment. Thou shalt not covet. And in the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 the Commandment specifically says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife."

So there are 3 sins, 3 commandments which are broken:

- Thou shalt not covet
- Thou shalt not commit adultery
- Thou shalt not murder

Our story begins in 2 Samuel 11 and I encourage you to have it open in front of you to get the most out of it. The first thing we notice is that David sends Joab and his army off to war while he stays at home in his Palace in Jerusalem. Previously David had been the one to lead his troops into battle but now he has a Palace and I presume he decides that's more comfortable.

This is David's first mistake. Instead of engaging in the battle against God's enemies he is relaxing at home, with far too much time on his hands.

*V2 "One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful."*

David is in a place of temptation and his resistance is zilch. However he doesn't sin immediately, but he certainly plays with it. He makes inquiries about who this woman is. He's probably hoping that she isn't married, but the report comes back that she is Bathsheba, the daughter of a Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. She is married. But this doesn't deter David. He is the King. He has absolute power. He sends messengers to fetch Bathsheba and he sleeps with her. Obviously, there is no good that is going to come of this, and yes she does fall pregnant and sends the message back to David.

David is in a pickle. Uriah has been away at war yet his wife became pregnant. Surely word will get out that she has been at the Palace. David has to cover his tracks.

So we come to cover up #1. Bring Uriah back from the battle and give him a night with his wife and it will look like the baby belongs to him. Simple! Problem solved! However, David doesn't count on Uriah being a man with so much integrity. Uriah refuses to go home and be with his wife, and for two reasons:

1. loyalty to his fellow soldiers. He will not indulge in pleasure while they are enduring the battlefield.
2. A religious reason, the Ark of God is in a tent, so that alongside the fact that the soldiers are only living in tents means he will not go into his house.

Note that Uriah is identified as a Hittite. This means his racial origins are pagan. It would seem he now worships Yahweh and fights in Israel's army for Yahweh's honour. But the text wants to make clear to us he is not a native Israelite. A Jew who understands this racial background would immediately pick up the incredible irony of the situation where David the anointed King of Israel, the leader of God's people is flagrantly breaking God's law while the pagan Hittite shows great respect for God's law.

David is not deterred. He has one more attempt at cover up. He invites Uriah to the Palace for a feast with plenty of wine and gets him drunk thinking this will loosen him up for a good night with Bathsheba. But Uriah chooses to sleep with David's servants rather than go home. Even a drunk Uriah shows more integrity than the deceptive King David.

So now things turn serious. Uriah is just not going to budge. There is only one more option and that is to take him out of the picture altogether. So he organises for Uriah to be placed out in the front of the attack where the fighting is fiercest and for the commander to withdraw the other men so that Uriah is struck down and killed. And of course that is exactly what happens.

It is interesting to note David's reaction when he finds out that Uriah has been killed. He makes light of it v25 when he tells the messenger, *"Don't let this upset you, the sword devours one as well as another."* In other words, he's saying, 'Such is a soldier's lot, get over it and get on with the battle'. Contrast that with David's response to the death of his sworn enemy King Saul. He mourned deeply for this tyrannical mad man, but here is a man who shows amazing integrity and he writes it off as nothing. All he has in mind is to cover his tracks. How low has David sunk.

In v27 David takes Bathsheba into the Palace and makes her his wife. He must have looked pretty good taking in a war hero's widow and looking after her. To all outward appearances David again looks the hero; except for one thing... Look at the last sentence in the chapter, *"But the thing David had done displeased the Lord."*

This story shows us how sin leads to concealment, which leads to more sin and it just spirals out of control.

- It starts with David shirking his responsibilities to lead his army in battle.

- When he sees temptation he doesn't immediately shut it down, he makes inquiries.

- When the answer comes back that this woman is married, he just goes ahead anyway because he is the King and that is what Kings do.

- When his sin produces an unwanted pregnancy he seeks to cover it up, but his two attempts are no match for the integrity of Uriah.

- Uriah in the end signs his own death warrant by being so true, King David sinks to the depths of murder. Yes the Lord is indeed displeased.

So how might we apply this passage? Firstly adultery.

Is adultery acceptable in our society today? I think society is rather confused on this issue. On the one hand, no it's not acceptable, it's seen as a terrible betrayal. There is still a generally held principle that a sexual relationship is one of deep intimacy and therefore should exclude others. You don't have to be a Christian to believe that. And when you see the hurt that is caused by adultery many would agree that it is morally wrong.

On the other hand, there is a growing number who would think that adultery is acceptable. 'You can't expect anything better and to be content with one partner for the whole of life is a bit much. If a marriage gets a little boring well then obviously the thrill of the hunt somewhere else is going to have great appeal and to be expected. If we look at our story, we see that David is bored, so the thrill of a new sexual relationship becomes very enticing.

But adultery is a sin that troubles the conscience possibly more than any other. In my pastoral conversations there have been more people confess this sin than any other and mostly because they are wanting relief from the feelings of guilt. I once had a stranger pull up at the Rectory on his way home from work and he came into my study and he said he had been unfaithful to his wife and he felt really bad that

he had betrayed her. And he said, "You've gotta help me get rid of this guilt." Maybe the swinging promiscuous lifestyle is not all it's cracked up to be.

We live in a society that is saturated with sex and there is a big lie out there that our highest human fulfilment is attained through selfindulgent, erotic encounters; rather than through faithful monogamous relationships.

If people give up faith in God then should we really expect anything different?

What basis do people have for maintaining a morality of faithfulness in marriage for life apart from God. When the chips are down is there any logical reason for holding on to that ideal apart from the fact that God says that is what is best for us. It is only if you accept that the Bible is God's Word and it holds up a morality for every time and place that is for our benefit, that you will discipline yourself to keep that morality.

There however will be times when we fail.

When that happens, there is one of two ways you can go.

1. You can conclude the moral standard is too high and throw it away.
2. Or you can believe the God who set that standard also has provided a means of redemption. One of the good things to come out of his story is that David chose his later path. For David it was Yahweh who determined what was right and wrong and when David realised his sin he sought forgiveness. Next week we will see how he confesses his sin and repents and finds God's redemption.

This story of David and Bathsheba is about sexual sin, but it is also about the bigger picture of Israelite Kingship. David as King was meant to represent God to his people. Yahweh was Israel's true king and human kings we're meant to be servants of Yahweh ruling on his behalf according to his law.

Saul failed in this high calling. The question before the nation was whether David would do any better? Before this incident he had a pretty good scorecard.

-He had resisted the temptation to grab power by killing Saul when he easily could have. He waited for God's timing.

-He accepted God's covenant to him last week in Chapter 7 with great humility.

On the negative side he failed to transport the Ark of the Covenant according to God's instructions when he was bringing it into Jerusalem. But he learnt from his mistake and then brought it in with wholehearted worship.

But the question is, will he recover from the disastrous sin recorded here in Chapter 11 or will he go the way of King Saul? He does have one thing on his side and that is God gave the nation of Israel prophets. The Kings of the other nations roundabout had absolute power with no one to question them. Yahweh gave Israel prophets who could speak a word from the Lord and call Kings to account. Of course it did require great courage because there were many times when Kings didn't like what the prophets were saying and greatly persecuted them.

David has a prophet and his name is Nathan. He is a courageous man of God who will bring a word of the Lord to David next week. Fortunately, David will heed the prophet's word and salvage something of his reign as King, but not without consequences.

Ultimately of course our salvation does not depend on David being a perfect leader; It doesn't depend on any of the Biblical characters being great examples of righteousness. We have a Son of David

- who never succumbed to sexual temptation;
- who never abused his use of power,
- who dealt justly with everyone he met.

That one of course is Jesus of Nazareth. He is described in the New Testament as the Son of David which means he is the Messiah, God's anointed one come to save us.

My friends there are some very important practical lessons we can learn from this story this morning. Firstly, be aware that no matter how much progress you have made in the Christian life, sin is always lurking at the door and we need to be on our guard. One would have thought that David had got to a point in his life where what we read about here would have been impossible. But sin is all pervasive and can take us down at any age. We shouldn't think we've ever got rid of it this side of the grave.

There are sins of youth and they are usually obvious because children and young people haven't learned yet how to cover up and haven't suffered the consequences of wrong enough to learn from their mistakes.

But there are also sins of age.

- There can be a spirit of superiority that looks down on youth.
- There can be a self-righteousness that doesn't think one has anything more to learn.
- And there can even be the idleness of a King David that allows temptation to get a hold.

So today we see

David stripped of his lustre.

- He covets,
- he commits adultery,
- he is a murderer.

The progression of sin is horrendous.

Can he be forgiven?

Is there redemption?

Well I think we know the answers to those questions but stay tuned next week anyway.

-Although David fails, the Son of David succeeds.

-Although David falls into temptation and sins terribly, the Son of David will resist temptation and completely do his Father's will.

My friends put your faith and trust in Jesus, the Son of David, and let him do for you what you cannot do for yourself.