

From Hesed to Stupid: A Journey from humble love to selfish indulgence
2 Samuel 10:1-11:5

“And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.”

Introduction: On the morning of June 4, 1942, two world powers squared off in the vast waters of the ocean in what would become arguable THE decisive battle that turned the tide of the war in the Pacific theater. Six months had passed since the unexpected and devastating attack at Pearl Harbor, which left American troops and leadership both shaken and resolved. Naval combat was thought to be waged with big guns hurled from the decks of battleships, but it was now clear that Aircraft carriers were key in the ability to fight from the sky. No American Aircraft Carrier was destroyed at Pearl, so a confrontation was inevitable in order to establish dominance of the ocean that divided the two nations.

For the years and months leading up to the battle around tiny *Midway Island* (or Atoll), the nation of Japan had expanded its reach, securing much needed bases and opportunities to gain precious oil, a resource that the main island lacked. A month earlier in May the two nations fought to what was in essence a draw at *Coral Sea*, with each losing ships and planes but for the first time, Japan was repelled in a battle. The aircraft carrier *Lexington* was lost, and though the *Yorktown* was heavily damaged, it was repaired enough to engage in the battle of Midway.

The Battle of Midway has always intrigued. It signified a clash of military tactics based on worldview values, involved code breaking (Americans knew the plan Japan had for Midway), bravery, and loss, as all wars experience. But what has always been on my mind is how a giant armada, filled with skilled sailors, pilots, leaders, and strategists, aboard ships that took years to make and which fought in many a conflict, could be taken down in a matter of 5-6 minutes. This battle that changed the course of WW2 hinged on what happened in a few moments based on decisions that, had they gone another way, would have changed the end result.

It was a decision by Japan’s decorated Admiral Nagumo to continue radio silence and change directives midway through the attack on the island of Midway that gave the American bombers time to find their carriers, filled with planes with full tanks of gas. It was the heroism of **C. Wade McClusky**, the Air group commander, who was in charge of finding the Japanese fleet and attacking. As they narrowed in on the coordinates that they *thought* the fleet would be, they found nothing but open ocean. Running low on fuel, McClusky made the decision to do one more sweep, following a hunch and intuition where *he thought* they’d be. Coming out of the clouds, his squadron, with others joining, was able to find and attack the **Kaga, Soryu, and Akagi**, and within 6 minutes, ¾ of Japan’s vaunted carrier strength was destroyed, with the Kaga and Soryu taking multiple hits and being set ablaze from stem to stern, while the Akagi receiving only one well-placed hit taking longer to sink. Later the fourth would be destroyed after it finally sunk the *Yorktown*, but the battle was decidedly one-sided.

All the momentum, planning, and victories Japan had experienced were turned in a few key moments, a bombing raid that lasted a few precious minutes, and everything changed.

As we come to a turning point in the kingship of David, we see a similar tale. At the height of his life and strength, David had it all: a promise of future kingship, peace, rest, power, family, wealth, and a magnanimous love by which he ruled. He was the best of the best, the one by which each king of Israel would be measured. *But even David was susceptible to selfish sin.* In this story, we see where David moves to living by **hesed**, a gracious, kind, others focused love, to being **stupid**, and indulging the

desires of his flesh. For us, this is NOT an opportunity to wag a finger and shake our head at David's choices, but rather to evaluate our own life in light of his, seeing that ALL of us are prone to fleshly, selfish, and sinful actions. If anyone here thinks they are above it or it could never happen to them, you need to listen to the arc of David's story and life. In a few moments, David's life would change forever, and his momentary action lead to a multiplication of sin, pain, and consequence.

Hesed for the Nations (10:1-2)

*After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. ² And David said, "I will **deal loyally** with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father **dealt loyally with me**." So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites.*

Last week we took a look at the loyal love David exercised toward Mephibosheth, the remaining son of Jonathan. The chapter was dominated with David reaching out toward a man who was born into royalty but cast out of society after being crippled and losing his father and grandfather (Saul). In an act of Christ-like grace, David welcomed into his home as a son, restored his dignity and land, and set him up with an inheritance into the future. This is one of the clearest illustrations we have of how God's love is poured out the **desperate and needy**, and how we cannot earn nor do we deserve the love given to us by God in Christ. This love, which is encapsulated in the word **hesed**, is the most expressive form we have and characterized David's rule.

But David was not done in giving kindly and loyally to others. As we reach chapter 10, we see that **hesed** is again in the forefront of the action and consideration, this time to the vaunted enemy of Israel in the form of the **Ammonites**, a descendent of the incest between **Lot and his daughter** (Genesis 19:38). We saw the harsh ways of **Nahash**, the king of the Ammonites, in **1 Samuel 11**, as he threatened to gouge out the right eye of the people of Jabesh-Gilead to bring disgrace on Israel and put them under his boot. It was Saul that intervened and saved his people in the high point of his kingdom. Apparently, in the time of his running from Saul, Nahash had done David right, and David had a sense of loyalty to the barbarous king. Upon hearing of his death, David sent his loyal men to console the son, **Hanun**, in an act of kindness and loyalty.

Here, David showed a counter-cultural love for the nations, the kind of love Israel was supposed to provide as a light to the darkness. Though the nations would rage against the rule of God (Psalm 2:1), Israel would be a conduit to call them to "be wise, be warned, and serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling." (Psalm 2:10-11). This was reiterated in **Acts 4** by the early believers who prayed for boldness to proclaim Christ in the midst of persecution.

Hubris From the Nations (10:3-6)

³ But the **princes** of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? **Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?**" ⁴ So Hanun took David's servants and **shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips**, and sent them away. ⁵ When it was told David, he sent to meet them, **for the men were greatly ashamed**. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return."

⁶ When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men

Even the kindest gesture will sometimes be greeted with distrust and despicable actions. Grace given is not always received graciously. David's desire to show loyal love was given a negative response from a young, foolish leader. Much like **Rehoboam** foolishly listening to his YOUNG advisors, putting more pressure on the people causing a split in the nation (1 Kings 12:1-8), Hanun listened to his princes, presupposing deceptive motives by David's men. Instead of hearing them out, he was proactive in following the shame driven actions of his father, but this time he did not threaten but enacted. He cut off **half the beard of David's men** and cut their clothes exposing their parts that should stay private. In Ancient near east culture, a man's beard was a sign of his masculinity (no shame for those that can't grow a beard today!), and cutting half of it (I'd assume down the middle, not giving them the "Abe Lincoln"), he shamed David's men. When David heard about this, he told the men to remain in Jericho and practice a "no shave" time until everything grew back and evened out, but it was clear the time of **hesed** was over and the time of **justice** was ready to be meted out. The Ammonites, knowing they had gone a bridge too far, hired a large military force to join them against the mighty Israel army, setting the stage for the rest of the chapter.

We are reminded **2 Corinthians 10:12**, *"Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they **measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.**"* When we surround ourselves and compare ourselves with people *exactly like ourselves*, we tend to **multiply ignorance, not wisdom**. God has given us a church that has a diverse makeup, with generations and others with experiences in life that we have not had yet. This is why we encourage multi-generational interaction in our shepherding groups to try to avoid the echo chamber that can be created when we are with people who have no more wisdom than we do. Hanun was foolish, and it cost him more than a shaved beard or cut clothes.

Handing out Justice (10:7-19)

The Ammonites knew they were in for it, so they went out and hired the brutes from the North, a Syrian mercenary force of impressive numbers of over 33,000. Hearing that they were gearing up for battle, David sent his general named Joab to deal with the uprising, and Joab would have had to move his force across the Jordan River up to modern day Jordan to attack the city of Rabbah.

The Surprising Fearlessness of Joab (10:7-14)

When Joab got to the fortified city of Rabbah, he was prepared for a full frontal attack which would have included a time of siege. What he did NOT count on was the old Pincer movement, with the Syrian army circling behind his men. It was here that Joab, a man known to do the unscrupulous, like kill Abner against the king's orders, showed an unusual trust in the **sovereignty of God**. He split his forces between he and his brother Abishai, with Joab taken on the Syrians and Abishai the Ammonites. If any of them faltered they would call for help. It was here that Joab gave one of the best statements of action in light of the sovereignty of God in all of Scripture:

2 Samuel 10:12 *"Be of good courage, and let us be **courageous** for our people, and for the cities of our God, and **may the Lord do what seems good to him**"*

Even from the mouth of the immature great wisdom can flow. In the midst of overwhelming odds, Joab knew exactly how to proceed, as all believers should. Courage did not come from within but without. He could proceed with sound military planning, could charge the battle field, could engage in combat, but it was ultimately up to God for not only victory, but even if defeat were handed out, that would come

from God's hand as well. We take all things from the hand of God's grace, the good and hard, and trust Him with the results. But this also means we function **IN LIGHT OF** His sovereignty, so we move forward with hope and joy, knowing that we are responsible for the effort but not the result. Here, God granted **victory**, which meant the Syrians fled back to their home in the North, and the Ammonites back to the security of their walled city. This creates a **tease in the text**, as Joab went back to Jerusalem with his soldiers but left the job unfinished. The battle was over but the war was still on, and the plan was to come back in the Spring to wipe out the city once and for all.

The Overwhelming Victory of David (10:15-19)

The Syrians also were not done, though they fled in fear. The mercenaries had met their match, so they enlisted the help of a character we met in chapter 8 named **Hadadezer**. This time, the text is plain and without much commentary as **David himself** went across the Jordan to meet the combined force, and God granted David the victory by killing over 40,000 soldiers, including the commander of the army, named Shobach. This victory meant that the Syrians were no longer going to be a threat from the North, and the Ammonites were going to be alone to face Israel, again, setting the stage for the final assault against Rabbah.

Now, there is *not much* that we glean theologically from the chapter, but it sets up the context for what happens next. Over the next few weeks we will unpack chapters 11 and 12, a vivid story of David's demise, repentance, restoration, and given consequences that will shape the rest of his life and reign.

What do we glean from this chapter?

- David was at the height of power and prestige at this point. All arrows were pointing up, and he possessed not only might but wisdom
- David was in want of nothing, and he was not living selfishly but magnanimously. There is no hint of a crack in the armor, no whisper of downfall in the context, that would make what happens next foreseeable.
- We remember that David HAD multiplied wives as a result of consolidating power and growing his family. This was NOT condoned by God, but was more likely an adoption of cultural and conventional wisdom. But it is clear David was NOT without access to proper sexual intimacy from any of many wives
- He was the real deal, a "man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 16:7), one whom God chose to build a covenant around (2 Sam. 7), and who loved God truly. He was not a fake, not a poser, not someone who was a self-righteous Pharisee. But he WAS a sinner, and sin is **deceptive, progressive, and oppressive**, and every human knows it's sting.

Hurdling into Sin (11:1-5)

*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.*

Sin is **captivating**, and sexual sin especially so. Here is what **James 1:14-15** says about the progression of sin:

*But each person is **tempted** when he is **lured** and **enticed** by his own **desire**. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives **birth to sin**, and sin when it is fully grown **brings forth death***

Sin is fostered, born, bred, and matured in our hearts, meaning that it is NOT what is outside of us that is the ultimate problem, but what is inside. Since our enemy is a crouching lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8), he uses things **outside of us to tempt that which is immaterial, our mind, heart, pride, lust, etc.** Add to this the drive of our lust, and Paul said this in **1 Thess. 4:3-6**:

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that **you abstain from sexual immorality**; 4 that each one of you know how to **control his own body in holiness** and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 **that no one transgress and wrong his brother** in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.*

The call to **abstain** is the call to run far away, not getting close to sexual sin. The reason is that those who do not know God are driven by their lusts, but we are driven by the Spirit. Sexual sin also sins against not only our own body but also another, and God gives a strict warning against it. This is what is displayed mightily in the life of David as he stayed out of war. David fell hard by making **short-sighted mistakes when his life was on the line**:

MISTAKE #1 – HE STOPPED PURSUING HIS RESPONSIBILITIES (v. 1)

The text makes it clear when it happened. The military force would have gathered to attack Rabbah in the Spring, mostly because it allowed them to move the resources necessary to prepare a **siege** against the walled city, a tactic that could take weeks or months to break. Sieges would have been monotonous, difficult, and uncomfortable, so David **went out of character** and sent Joab, while he stayed back in Jerusalem. This left David without a forward purpose and left his mind, eyes, and hands **idle**. For us, this is equivalent to "taking a break" from our disciplines of grace, from pursuing God through His Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers, leaving our minds idle and hearts left to wander.

MISTAKE #2 – HE PUT HIMSELF IN A POSITION OF TEMPTATION (v. 2)

This would have been equivalent to allowing oneself to dive into social media or text mindlessly with someone of the opposite sex. David went up on his roof to catch the evening breeze, putting himself in the view line of houses below. Here his eye caught a beautiful woman bathing, and his lust and desire was engaged. It's instructive that he **had an out right here, where he could have turned and abstained, but instead he lingered and continued**.

MISTAKE #3 – HE GAVE INTO THE LUST OF HIS EYES (v. 3-5)

The text does not give much information as it focuses on the sequence of action. What is clear is the progression of sin: David **SAW, he SENT, INQUIRED, SENT, TOOK, and LAID WITH her**. Lust never stays in its lane, never goes away quietly, and always wants to be unleashed. There is not a focus on Bathsheba, other than identifying her as the daughter of one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:34) and

wife of Uriah (whose name meant “The LORD is my light”), who was not a natural Israelite but a loyalist to them. There is a note that Bathsheba had just finished her purification, which meant the news of her pregnancy **had to be David, not her husband**, who was faithfully off in battle. There was no note of romance, of conversation, of care, of **hesed**, but instead the exercising of selfish lust which not only destroyed David but put into motion a series of sinful events. In a **moment of decision**, David went from **hesed to stupid**, from pursuing God to pursuing his own desires, from caring for others to using them.

We will delve into the rest of the chapter that goes into detail of David’s deception and cover up, but here we must all take stock in our own lives, hearts, and minds. Are we pursuing God in Christ or have we become lax? Have we indulged our desires and left ourselves idle? Have we stopped recognizing the battle for our heart is ALWAYS raging, and there is not holiday? Have we sought to repent from actions that have been fueled by our lust?

In his commentary, **Dale Davis** gave this wise insight into this part of the story, and it’s worth repeating:

“The warning in this text reaches far beyond King David and touches all professed servants of Christ. **How suddenly and fatally any of us can fall!** There is a snip from Robert Robinson’s hymn (‘Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing’) that scares me, I think because I understand it:

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love.*

Maybe Robert Robinson understood it too. He had been converted under George Whitfield’s preaching in 1752 and later became a Baptist pastor in Cambridge. Toward the end of his life he had again ‘*given way to frivolous habits*’, as one account has it. One day during this period he was traveling by stagecoach. Another passenger, a lady and total stranger, was going over some hymns and especially and persistently referred to ‘Come, Thou Fount’ as one that had brought her immense blessing. As she continued speaking, Robinson became agitated and burst out, ‘**Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then.**’¹

So we sing: “Here’s my heart, O, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above”.

¹ Dale Davis, “2 Samuel: Out of every adversity”, p. 142.