

SERMON APRIL 26, 2015: "DAVID AND BATHSHEBA, SEX AND JESUS" (2 SAMUEL 11)

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In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

² 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, ³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵ The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁶ So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰ David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

¹² Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵ In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

¹⁶ So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. ¹⁷ When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

¹⁸ Joab sent David a full account of the battle. ¹⁹ He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, ²⁰ the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? ²¹ Who killed Abimelek son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.' "

²² The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. ²³ The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. ²⁴ Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead."

²⁵ David told the messenger, “Say this to Joab: ‘Don’t let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.’ Say this to encourage Joab.”

²⁶ When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. (NIV 2011)

INTRODUCTION

You’re probably familiar with a pattern in sit-coms like “Seinfeld”: One person tells a lie, and then, trying to cover it up, they have to make up a more and more unbelievable story. One cover-up leads to another, but ultimately they are found out. Hiding the truth doesn’t ultimately work—and freedom is only found when the truth comes out.

This sermon could be entitled “The Great Cover-Up”.

In this story, David tries to cover up His sins...but as we see through this passage and next week’s, we are powerless to hide or get rid of our own sin. Only when we confess them and trust that they are covered by the blood of Jesus do we find freedom.

But this isn’t just about sexual sin, or about the explicit act of adultery. This is a message for all of us whether or not sin tends to manifest sexually or in other ways in our lives. Sexual sin is sin, is deeply destructive, and grieves God—but it is not the only sin, and it’s not the unforgivable sin. And if we can’t see ourselves in this story (no matter whether it’s with sexual sin or financial sin or pride or unbelief or lack of trust in God), we probably aren’t truly hearing God’s Word here.

This morning, we’ll first walk through the story as it unfolds, but not spend much time commenting. It’s pretty straightforward. Then, we’ll ask what this means for how David’s story points us to the Son of David, Jesus. Then we’ll ask what this means for us. We’ll spend the most time here, addressing dynamics of sin (particularly sexual sin), confession, and forgiveness. God calls us to take sin seriously, but His salvation even more seriously. What does this story show us about ourselves and the gospel?

THE PASSAGE

David finally (after years of living in the gap between God’s promise and his experience) is recognized as king by the people. And now he’s in the palace, defeating enemies, and it seems like everything’s going well. Then we come to chapter 11.

THE SCENARIO (verse 1): “David sent Joab...But David remained in Jerusalem.”

There’s a contrast here between David’s men risking their lives and sacrificing their comfort, and David staying behind in comfort. Maybe David was staying behind like the

president wouldn't go into the front lines—shouldn't unnecessarily risk his life—but this seems to be a red flag.

Sometimes temptation is heightened by situational factors. Boredom, and long periods alone can increase temptation—sexual or otherwise...and maybe David staying home instead of leading the army creates a situation of temptation here.

THE TEMPTATION (verses 2-3): "From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful..."

At this point David hasn't done anything wrong—unless he really should have been at war instead of at home, and unless his gaze lingers. Similarly, the devil may use external things to tempt us (an image that pops up on our computer, a billboard, or a growing, intimate friendship with someone who's not our spouse). But we can never put the ultimate blame on those things.

James 1:14-15: "...each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

External situations wouldn't be tempting if there weren't wrong desires IN US already. David could have seen the woman and looked the other way out of respect for her and her husband and God—knowing that she doesn't belong to him. But he doesn't.

ENTERTAINING THE TEMPTATION (verse 3): "and David sent someone to find out about her."

Sin grows quickly when our minds dwell on it—even if we haven't already DONE anything yet.

So David discovers that the woman is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. In 2 Samuel 23:39, there's a list of the heroes in David's army—"mighty men" who are like his special forces. And it turns out Uriah is one of them.

So if we were concerned about the direction David's headed, we might be relieved at this point. This is the wife of one of David's best fighters, so that at least should keep him from doing anything to her, right? But it doesn't.

THE ACT (verse 4): "Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her."

David covets—sets his desires on someone who doesn't belong to him—and commits adultery. Instead of using the power God has GIVEN him as king to serve God's people, he uses his power to exploit. He forgets that as king, he's accountable to the true king—God Himself.

THE VISIBLE RESULT (verse 5): “The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, ‘I am pregnant.’”

And Bathsheba is pregnant. Pregnancy is not the sin; that’s the RESULT of David’s sin. And the child is not the sin; the child is a life in God’s image, created by God. But the circumstance of conception was David’s sin.

THE GREAT COVER-UP (verses 6-27)

So now, with this visible evidence of David’s adultery, he begins the great cover-up. He sends for Uriah under pretext of concern for his men. Of course, we know that David is really concerned about the army or Uriah, or Bathsheba...this isn’t love; it’s lust and manipulation. Then sends Uriah back home, assuming he’ll sleep with Bathsheba and assume the child is his. But he doesn’t: In contrast to David staying home, he won’t enter his home while his fellow soldiers are on the battlefield! So David tries again, and makes Uriah drunk. But “Uriah drunk is more pious than David sober.” (Ackroyd, as quoted in Arnold, 529) Now David’s in a bind. So he sends Uriah back to war, and basically orders his execution. Trying to cover up the evidence of his guilt by harming those he’s sinned against.

Then, at the end of our passage, Bathsheba mourns the death of her husband and then David takes her as his wife. Just two verses, but her whole world has been turned upside-down by what David has done. Uriah is dead, Joab is complicit in his death, and her marriage has been destroyed.

Sin wreaks havoc, internally and externally. God’s law isn’t random; it’s about how life is designed to be—and sin disrupts it like drinking gasoline would disrupt our health. We might not always see the consequences of sin (as some might argue about unmarried consenting adults sleeping together, or a monogamous homosexual couple, or greed or coveting). But we can trust God’s word over our understanding. He doesn’t just love rules; He loves us—He loves His glory—so He gives us commands for our good.

But then we read, “After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son.”

It seems like life just goes on, like David’s cover-up worked...but it doesn’t. Cherished and unconfessed sin chains you and hamstring growth in relationship with God and others. It would be like if a broken bone heals crooked: It must be re-broken in order to set right, or will give you a limp for the rest of your life.

Arnold: “Sin, once it has been committed, if suppressed and concealed, will only lead to more sinning and, if left uncontested, will result in hardened, uncaring sinners.” (Arnold, 530)

GOD SEES (verse 27): “But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.”

Even if no one else can see David’s sin, he can’t hide it from God.

Again, David tries to cover up His sins...but he is powerless to truly erase them. Only when we confess them and trust that they are covered in the blood of Jesus can we be free.

So we can never cover over our own sin—either by layering sin on sin, or layering good deeds on top of sin.

The goal of this sermon is NOT just to prevent sexual sin from ever happening (although I hope that in seeing David's story here we can recognize and cut sin off before it grows); it is to show us the condition of our hearts and our need for Jesus, and it is to allow God to increase our hatred of sin and gratitude for His forgiveness and cleansing!

DAVID, BATHSHEBA, AND JESUS

So how does this point us to Jesus?

So far we've been through a long sermon series leading up to David being king, and finally he arrives. He sees God's faithfulness to His promise. And now he throws it all away!

We may have pinned our hopes on David, and now are tempted to say, "Well, there that goes...it must have just all been an act!" What happened to the David we thought we knew? But we shouldn't really be too surprised at David, if we are aware of the sin in our own lives. The Apostle Paul in Romans 7: "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature." The problem is if we pin our hopes on David, or any human, or ourselves—instead of Jesus.

Even King David falls short. Even he needs a Savior.

This is evidence that the Bible is ultimately written by God. If it had been written by people in power, how on earth would David or the Israelites have let this story slip through the editing process?

But there's hope for David, because God is bigger than his sin. This isn't the end of the story for him. And if our sins had the last word, we'd be done for. But what did our sin result in? God sending Jesus.

Here David's story points us to Jesus by showing David's insufficiency. We need a better king than even David! And God has provided the only One who has truly covered over sins—our sinless King who gave Himself for us. The lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

DAVID, JESUS, AND US

If we come to the end of this story and pat ourselves on the back because at least we haven't done THAT ("At least I'm not THAT bad!"), we haven't truly listened. And if we come to the end of this story and are loaded down with shame (whether because of unconfessed sexual sin in our lives, or other areas of sin), with no hope of forgiveness, we haven't yet heard God's word of grace.

We need to ask God to show us ourselves in the story, whether or not we've sinned in the same ways as David. We need to see our desperate need for God's forgiveness, and our complete powerlessness to cover up our own sin...and then we need to see God's astounding provision in the One who died to truly take away our sin.

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL SIN

The root of David's sin here is, like one writer puts it, that David's acting like he's king of his own life—when in reality God is King. We're going to focus on sexual sin over the next few minutes, but again, remember that this is for each of us, whether or not our main struggle is with sexual sin.

But before we address the dynamics of sexual sin, we have to remember that sin is a twisting of something God created good. God created us as humans, and that includes sexual desires...and after creating Adam and Eve, He said it was very good. Sex, when within the limits God created it for—a man and woman in a lifelong marriage—is good. If we have any doubt of this, read Song of Solomon.

And precisely because sex as God designed it is good, it's deeply destructive when it breaks outside of that design. David's action breaks into Bathsheba and Uriah's marriage (which pornography and lust do too—in effect introducing other partners into a present or future marriage) and leads to the ultimate destruction of that marriage. Sex is not sin; using it in a way contrary to its purpose within marriage is.

SEXUAL SIN AND SHAME

Just as sex in God's design is not sin, sexuality is nothing to be ashamed of. But maybe because it is something so intimate, sexual sin often carries an extra load of shame and guilt.

Of course, there's a difference between feelings of guilt, and the reality of guilt. Shame and guilt are meant to alert us to a problem—just like physical pain is meant to alert us that we're damaging our hand if we keep it on the burner. Of course, sometimes our feelings are out of whack...we might feel guilty when we shouldn't, or don't feel guilty when we should. So although feelings of guilt and shame are important, our standard is always God's Word telling us what is right and wrong, not our feelings.

And where there's sexual sin, the solution is not just to get rid of the feelings of shame and guilt; it's to get rid of the guilt itself—whatever is dishonoring to God. We'll talk about this in a minute.

But there's a problem if our sense of shame is bigger than our sense of God's grace, and bigger than our desire to be rid of the sin. If that's the case, sexual sin will just fester, like an infected wound that needs to be cleaned out but is just wrapped up instead. Don't ever let any sin—no matter how shameful—come between you and Jesus. Turn it over to Him!

Remember, sex is not the unforgivable sin! The only unforgivable sin is forever rejecting the one Savior God has given us.

BEING SINNED AGAINST

As we talk about sexual sin, we can't forget that some of us have been sinned against sexually, and need healing. Unconfessed sin is a cycle: We're sinned against, and we sin against others. And for those who have been abused sexually, there can be a huge load of shame even then. Sin hurts more than just the sinner. And if this is you, know that there is healing in Jesus. He gives the church to walk alongside you and support you as you seek His healing. So pray for wisdom, find someone trustworthy (maybe a counselor, pastor, or trusted friend), and let them help you walk toward healing and forgiveness.

SIN AND COVER-UPS

In the story of David here, we see him trying to cover his tracks. Don't we do the same? I remember when I was younger, and went through a period in which I was stealing small things around the house. Thankfully God didn't let me alone when I did...I tried to go on with life; I tried to just push it down, but I couldn't cover the knowledge that I'd done wrong. But freedom only came when I came clean.

WILLPOWER CANNOT SAVE US

If we ended the sermon here, the final theme might seem to be, "Don't do it! Don't ever, ever sin sexually like this!" But if that's our only take-away, we haven't heard the gospel. This passage should show us how ugly sin is, and its presence in our own hearts—whether or not ours looks like David's sin. The more clearly we see how short we fall of God's law, the more we see of our twisted motives and desires, the more we must despair of our own goodness. The more clearly we come to see that we need a Savior, and we aren't that Savior. In Reformed thinking, that's the first use of the law: When we see the Ten Commandments, the very first thing it should do is drive us to our knees as we recognize our need for God's grace.

THE CROSS

So if the ultimate moral of this story were, "Don't ever, ever do it!" we would all be lost. We may not have committed adultery, but Jesus reminds us that lust is adultery in our heart. We may not have murdered, but hatred is murdering someone else in our mind. And which of us is innocent of the sin beneath it all—pride, trying to run our own lives apart from complete dependence on, obedience to, and love for God?

The answer is not "Don't ever, ever do this"; the answer is the good news of God's forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation in Jesus, freeing us from our sin and giving us a new heart.

We see it all through the Bible: God justifies the ungodly (not the "not-so-nice"). He removes our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west. The Lamb of God

who takes away the sin of the world. He has swept away our transgressions like a cloud, our sins like the morning mist. So we can return to God!

When we trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are not our own; we are fully forgiven and claimed as God's own. And that means there's a new way to live.

Only as we confess our sins, and trust that they are covered in the blood of Jesus, can we be freed to live as the sons and daughters of God we are in Him.

CONFESSION

That brings us to confession. It feels like DEATH to come clean and confess our sin—especially sexual sin—but that's the only way for the cycle to be stopped.

But we could never confess with confidence if we thought God were just waiting to beat us down. I would never have admitted to my parents that I'd stolen something if I thought they'd just throw me out on the street. God is even more just and more merciful than the best parents. If we confess our sins, (SLOW) he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The only place healing and forgiveness can take place is at the cross, receiving God's grace through Jesus.

And remember, the goal should never just be to get something off our chest, or confess to be rid of the feeling of guilt. If we only want to be rid of the feeling of guilt rather than the sin itself (which hurts our relationship with God and others), then we need to confess that sin to God. Jesus is not in the business of getting rid of feelings for those who want to feel ok but then go straight back to the same life. He's in the business of reconciling us to God. So come to Him if you desire to be rid of sin (and come even if you don't, and confess that lack of desire to Him)—even if that desire isn't perfect, even if we keep on stumbling back into that sin, and keep on looking to Him for forgiveness and transformation.

But even though our sins are ultimately against God, we won't experience full healing if we just confess in silent prayer. We need to, as much as possible, confess to all those hurt by our sin, and perhaps to another trusted Christian as well. James 5:16: "...confess your sins TO EACH OTHER and pray for each other so that you may be healed." We don't practice formal confession like the Catholic Church does, but I think we've lost something valuable if we neglect these passages.

When we don't feel our guilt, we may need another Christian to say, "That is sin." And when we don't feel God's forgiveness, we may need another Christian to assure us that we are forgiven.

So God's forgiveness through Jesus needs to be proclaimed and embodied by His people. Of course, there are people who are NOT safe to confess to. If someone doesn't truly know their own brokenness and need for Jesus, they may not yet be safe—and I wouldn't

recommend baring your heart to them, unless they were one of the ones affected by your sin.

And for all of us, whenever one of us comes clean about sexual sin or other sin, there are several wrong responses: “We all do it...” (not calling sin sin, basically saying “It’s ok”) or saying “How could you ever do that?!” (standing in judgment over the other person, subtly proud that you haven’t fallen in this way) or saying “God forgives you” but then distancing from relationship. The right response is listening, taking sin seriously wherever it is present, and then encouraging repentance while pointing to God’s forgiveness in Jesus. That may look like a prayer together, in which the one sharing has the opportunity to pray aloud, confessing that sin to God, and then being assured of God’s forgiveness. And it might look like regular confession as that habit is broken.

It’s a beautiful thing to see how God has gathered this congregation. We are a group of people who are beginning to see our sin and brokenness and need for Jesus...and to see our Savior. But there’s always the temptation to cover up instead of confessing. As the church, we need to cultivate a culture of confession.

And confession, repentance, isn’t just turning FROM sin; it has to involve turning TOWARD God—to trust in His forgiveness and listen to Him and follow Him. Only when we confess our sins and trust that they are covered in the blood of Jesus can we be set free.

And when Jesus cleanses from sin, He FULLY cleanses. Forgiveness isn’t like a washing machine that gets out most of the mud and dirt, but leaves a hint of the grass stain. When God washes us, He washes us completely. You are not “damaged goods”; we are forgiven and loved sons and daughters of God!

And as we confess and believe, our sin isn’t just wiped away; God actually turns it to good. As a friend put it: “Your darkest sin, when brought to Jesus, becomes your greatest sword for the gospel!” The more we see how much God has forgiven us, the more clearly we can point others to His grace.

INVITATION

If the Bible were sanitized and nice and had people who sometimes said “Darn it” when they stubbed their toe, or who (in their worst moments) were too much in a hurry to stop and help an elderly lady across the street, it would be a nice book, but not a book of God’s love for US. That wouldn’t reflect our lives...but this story does. David shows us a real sinner...and we find that this is us. But we know the God who forgives sins, covers them over, and forever blots them out by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That’s amazing grace.