

## **ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

### **HANNAH JORDAN AND JIM CAPPS**

**JULY 29, 2012**

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**"YOU ARE THE MAN!"**

**II SAMUEL 12:1-14**

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#### **Jim**

Today, we are going to do something a little bit different in that I have invited one of our summer interns, Hannah Jordan, to do a dialogue sermon with me. I have done these kinds of sermons with other ministers on the staff on which I have served as well as with my daughter, Becky, on a Father's Day at the church where she was an associate and my African daughter, Hermioni, at First Presbyterian Church of Greensburg, here in Indiana.

Hannah will be a senior this year at Davidson College, just north of Charlotte, North Carolina. Interestingly, in the "it's a small world" category, Hannah is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio where she served last summer. But since her mother grew up in Indy and her aunt, Marcia, lives here in Zionsville, as does her grandfather, she was interested in spending the summer in our fair town. By the way, her internship is one of five fellowships offered each summer for Davidson students who are considering going into some kind of ministry.

The first time Hannah and I talked about the details of this summer's internship, we "skyped" since she was finishing a semester at St. Andrew's University in Scotland. Thanks Hannah for spending your summer with us and thanks for agreeing to do this dialogue sermon today.

#### **Hannah**

Well, Jim, it's really been a joy to be here this summer. Might I add that I think the time we skyped was your first time doing so? Figuring out the camera part of it took a little explaining, but Jim is such a quick learner. He really excelled from that moment on, and we even skyped with his daughter and granddaughter while he visited them in Florida earlier this summer. But really, from my first day at this church, the staff eagerly welcomed me into their family. And I'm so thankful for the willingness of this congregation to let me experience different aspects of ministry this summer. You've encouraged me to play with the worship band and let me sign up to pray during services. And I've seen and experienced a lot over the past eight weeks. I've been doused in shaving cream with middle school students at Sledge, and I've gotten to participate in prayer gatherings for ill friends. I've seen God at work in many ways and I can honestly say that I've had a rich and full experience here. One of the most important things I've learned through my time here is that when God pushes me out of my comfort zone, I learn much more than I could ever have learned by being in a comfortable place. Whether it's working with a new church, making a hospital visit or even preaching, this has been true. And as I've worked alongside Jim on this sermon, I have to say, I've been encouraged by him each step of the way. I've already seen God working through our planning process and discussion, and now I'm excited to see how God takes this experience of preaching to bring me closer to Him.

### **Jim**

Today we are continuing the series, "After God's Own Heart," on the life of David, Israel's Greatest King. We will be looking at II Samuel 12 which contains one of the most powerful parables ever uttered. Instead of being spoken to a great crowd of people as often were Jesus' parables, this parable of the prophet, Nathan, was spoken only to King David.

Hannah, I can't believe how fortuitous it is that you are sharing this sermon with me since I know that this parable is all about sheep. If I got it right, there are more sheep in Scotland than there are people. I've even noticed that you have had a sheepish grin on your face all summer, so I am assuming that you were "knee-deep" in sheep last semester and can shine some really important light on them for us.

### **Hannah**

Right, Jim. Sheep. Okay I think I need to make one thing clear before we move forward with this sermon. This past semester, while I was abroad, I wasn't a tourist. I was merely a hard-working student, who just happened to take many weekend excursions to see the Highlands and Aberdeenshire and Castles. But to be completely honest, I don't think I spent time with any sheep. Sure, I may have seen one or two from a distance, but I never got close enough to know much about them. I think I'm just as inept at explaining "sheep" and their important role in society as you are. But maybe we can make do with our inexperience here.

### **Jim**

Well, that's disappointing, but, that being the case, let's get into the passage and see what is going on. Please turn with us to II Samuel 12:1-14.

Let's go a little deeper into the powerful passage we just read. It's important that we know the context for what we see happening here.

### **Hannah**

As we approach this passage today, let's take a look to see where David is at this point in his life. Last week we discussed how one sin leads to another, and how even David, a man after God's own heart, was not exempt from sin. We looked at one of David's greatest moments of weakness: a moment where David called Uriah the Hittite's wife, Bathsheba, to him because he saw her bathing and lusted after her. David slept with Bathsheba who then found out that she was with child. And so David tried to cover up his sin, eventually causing Uriah's death, and other innocent lives to be harmed. Perhaps no one besides those within David's inner circle knew about the sins he tried to cover up. And on the surface, it appeared as though everything was okay. David had been quick to marry Bathsheba after the death of her husband, and Bathsheba appeared to be pregnant by David in a respectable way. So when Nathan comes to David, probably a significant amount of time has passed. Scholars estimate about a year. Bathsheba and David's child has been born, and David has probably returned back his routine. And then, when things finally seem to be normal again, something unexpected occurs.

### **Jim**

It's important to note that this conversation must have come from "out of the blue" for David. Nathan and David have worked together in the past. Nathan has been God's chief spokesman to David when he had difficult decisions to make. In II Samuel 7, it is Nathan who speaks God's promise of a special future for David and Israel there in that place. He states that it will be David's son who will build a house for the Lord.

David and Nathan seem to have a very meaningful relationship built principally upon two important factors. They both have a deep love for and growing relationship with God. With that as a foundation, they also have a mutual respect for each other.

Probably compartmentalizing his life and relationship with Nathan, David has not shared the story of his sin with Bathsheba and the deadly attempts to cover it up. Yet, somehow, someway, Nathan knows what has happened.

### **Hannah**

So even though David's story starts to pick up speed when Nathan comes before him with this parable, perhaps the story doesn't really begin with Nathan. Instead, this story begins with the God of the Universe who sent Nathan. We read in the passage, in the very first verse, that "The LORD sent Nathan to David." Nathan is called by God to speak into David's life. God is orchestrating each step of this encounter and Nathan is merely the instrument God uses to reach his good end. So for us to better understand how God uses Nathan to speak effectively, let's look at a few powerful elements.

First, Nathan's parable is one that has been thought up in a creative way so as to speak powerfully to David. David, in his earlier days, was a shepherd. We may not get the whole "sheep" thing, but David did! Nathan used his *God-given creativity* and his knowledge of who David is to shape a storyline that penetrates David's heart.

What makes Nathan an especially good prophet is his ability to meet David where he is. Nathan has been patient. He lets a year go by before he approaches David on this subject and when he does so, he doesn't immediately accuse David or even hurry the process of speaking truth to him. Instead, Nathan waits for God to direct him to a moment of speaking.

And maybe most importantly, Nathan brings David to a point of self-realization and even self-condemnation. David sees the sin. He sees the flaw of this "rich man" and, in doing so, David is able to understand that he has sinned against God. And when Nathan says, "You are the man" he is merely pointing to what David has probably already acknowledged in his heart. Nathan helps bring David back to a point where he can return to God with the knowledge of his sin.

### **Jim**

I appreciate so much what Nathan does after He points out that the parable of the stolen lamb is really all about David. He goes on in a marvelous way to speak on behalf of God and tell him all that the Lord has given David.

- God has anointed him as the king after delivering him from King Saul.
- God has given him Saul's house and wives and the authority over Israel and Judah.

- God, through Nathan, goes on to say that if that hadn't been enough, He would have given him more.

*With this wonderful backdrop of God's love and grace, Nathan proclaims the stark reality of what David did. God saw and was displeased with all of it. David would see the repercussions of his sin lived out in the life of his family as well as the life of Israel.*

After these words, as he has been confronted with God's gracious love and his own miserable failure, David confesses that he has sinned against God. In the Bible, the idea of "confess" means simply to "agree" that you have done something. In this case, it is David simply saying that he admits that he has sinned against God. Maybe others either didn't know or have forgotten what has happened, but God knew and has not forgotten. In this statement there seems to be genuine sorrow for his actions and authentic repentance.

### **Hannah**

Before Nathan goes any further, he makes sure that David knows *he is forgiven!* As soon as David confesses, God forgives. And furthermore, Nathan says to David, "you are not going to die." There's a curious juxtaposition or contrast here, in this passage. Did you notice it? David, a wise king, just moments before, had judged the man in the parable, saying, this man "deserves to die!" Little did David know in that moment that he was speaking about and judging himself. David has unknowingly just condemned himself to die. And even though it may seem a harsh punishment for a deed so small, David seems to grasp that sin is sin, no matter what it looks like. But Nathan says, as soon as David confesses, that *he will not die!* What a contrast this is to what David has just judged upon himself! David says, this man deserves to die and yet Nathan says this man will live. We see something similar in the New Testament, in Paul's letter to the Romans. In Romans chapter 6 verse 23, we read, "For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is eternal life." I wonder how many times we are in David's shoes. How many times do we fall short of God's glory, and yet, as soon as we agree with God that we have sinned, he forgives? We confess, God forgives. That's the incredible pattern that we are a part of today because Jesus died for us. He paid the price for all of our sins when he died on the cross. Like David, we deserve to die, but like David, we are forgiven because God's grace covers our sins.

And yet despite the incredible healing that takes place, we see that sin has already done its damage. The small, 3 letter coordinating conjunction that we find at the beginning of this phrase is "but." This verse reads, "But because by doing this you have made enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." This small word at the beginning of the phrase says a lot. Even though David is forgiven, the effects of his sins have already begun to take place and they will not be stopped. (do we go further with this? It feels incomplete).

### **Jim**

Even as you stated so well, David was forgiven, but David, in a very real way, did suffer the consequences or repercussions of his sin. After Nathan left, David finds out that the son born to Bathsheba and him, was ill. While David knew that Nathan had said the child would die, he pleaded with God on behalf of the child. He fasted and fell on his face in utter humility before the Lord, but the child died.

It's difficult enough to raise children in one family, but David had different wives with whom he had children. Being raised together in the palace caused great rivalry among the wives and among the children. All of this sprang from David's sin.

Let me cite a couple of examples. In II Samuel 13, one of David's sons, Amnon, falls head over heels in love with Tamar who was the daughter of another of David's wives and the sister of Absalom. Amnon shrewdly devises a plan to be alone with Tamar and then rapes her. Absalom is so enraged that for two whole years he harbors a vengeful spirit against Amnon. This culminates with Absalom having Amnon murdered.

When David finds out that Absalom was behind Amnon's death, refuses to see Absalom's face for 2 whole years. Absalom then conspires to take over his father's throne causing civil war. David has to flee the palace and Absalom takes David's wives. To make a long story short, Absalom meets a horribly violent death at the hands of David's men. When David hears what happens, he is deeply grieved and devastated. His outward grief for Absalom humiliates David's loyal soldiers who have brought him victory.

Do you get a picture of twists and turns, like that of a "soap opera" which David, his family, and Israel experienced because of him? It didn't stop there. There would be rivalry in his family finally leading to a divided kingdom-Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

As is true for so many of the stories of the Bible, there are many applications which we can take away from this part of David's life. Hannah, what do you think is the main thing we can come away with?

### **Hannah**

Well, Jim, we've talked a lot about this together and come to the same conclusion, pretty much word-for-word that *All of us need Nathans to speak truth into our lives*. We all fall short of what God intends for us and when we do, it is especially important that we have others around us who can speak truth in the way we need to hear it. And then, when we hear these Nathans speaking truth to us, how do we respond? Do we let our pride get in the way because we're offended by what our trusted friends have to say? Or are we willing to be spoken to? And more than that, are we willing to respond? I think the second part of this passage asks *us* to be Nathans to others. Will we step out in faith, even risking closeness in that relationship, for the sake of our friends? Will we be authentic in responding to God's call for us to be Nathans to one another and speak to one another without ulterior motives? Nathan came to David probably not because he wanted to, but because he trusted that God needed to speak into David's life and was going to do so through him. Will we trust that we need to be spoken to but also that God needs to speak through us? This morning, some of us feel more like David, caught in the middle of sin and wrestling through it. We may or may not have a Nathan speaking to us, but will we be open to listen for God's voice coming to us through our trusted friends? Some of us may find ourselves more in Nathan's shoes this morning, knowing that there is someone we dearly love that we are called to speak truth to. Will we be intentional in our response? Wherever you may find yourself this morning, know that your story, whatever it may be, takes place on a stage where the backdrop is God's grace and his love. And whenever you falter, fall back on that good and true knowledge that God is loving you every step of the way and wants you desperately to return to Him. David confessed, God forgave. We confess, God forgives.

## Jim

Wow! That is powerful! We all need Nathans to speak truth into our lives. As I have thought about the Nathans in my life, I have had several of them. In each case, they have been people with whom I had become good friends, people I deeply respected.

While not quite like David, I'm happy to say, I can remember one such friend in the early years of my ministry in Belleville, Illinois. His name was Bob. Bob had been a very successful high school football coach, who left coaching when he was on the top and became an entrepreneur in business. Sharing a love of sports, we played tennis, racquetball, basketball and softball together. We also served together in the leadership of the St. Louis Area Fellowship of Christian Athletes. I have never had a better a friend than Bob, who was also a very committed participant in our church and very involved in Cursillio, which is like our Great Banquet.

I'll never forget a time when Bob and I used our church bus to take a group of high school students to a weekend FCA Retreat. On the way back, Bob became a Nathan in a way I hadn't planned.

At the right moment when we had stopped for dinner, Bob spoke truth into my life in a way I hadn't necessarily wanted, but needed. I could tell he had been thinking about what he was telling me for some time. While I was at first defensive, there was no question that he was speaking out of his love for me as a brother. He cared enough to risk my anger.

Basically, he told me that my sermons were too long and unduly repetitious. He said that once I had made my point I did not have to go back and make it all over again. That review was boring and lost most people.

Since this critique was coming from Bob, I took it seriously. I changed the way I preach. I will always be indebted to him for his courage in being a Nathan, speaking needed truth into my defensive, stubborn life.

Who are your Nathans? Do you have people through whom God speaks truth into your life? While not easy, my wife, Alice, has also played that role for me in a very real way. We all need Nathans who bring truth to us, no matter how difficult it may be.

Just as you have said, Hannah, we also need to **be** Nathans in the lives of others. Within the context of relationships, are you willing to risk being a Nathan to someone you love and care for? I'm afraid we are reticent to play that role in the lives of others. Yet, each of us desperately needs people like Nathan whom God uses to speak truth into the lives of people they love.

One of the great ways for a Nathan to speak truth into your life comes through being in a small group or One2One relationship. If you are curious about entering into such a relationship, there are sheets where you can express your interest at the Welcome Center in the Gathering Space.

If you would like to share a joy or concern with someone today and would like someone to pray with you, there will be people at the cross in the alcove to our right who would feel privileged to spend time with you.