The Hope of Sin

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What joy! I get to preach on the “S-word” this morning! SIN! There are two names forever-linked to David’s life—the Philistine giant, Goliath, and Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. You don’t even need to know your Bible to know these 2 famous names. As a young shepherd boy, David triumphs over Goliath. As a king in his prime, David sins against Bathsheba; he sins against his family; against God. So sin is on our menu this morning. More than anything else this morning I want you to hear this good news, from Eugene Peterson’s Leap Over A Wall. The good news is that the “place of sin is a place not of accusation or condemnation, but of salvation” (p.191). This is good-news: sin is our only hope, because recognizing and naming that something is wrong are the first steps towards making it right (Barbara Brown Taylor’s Speaking of Sin, p.59).

Here’s King David’s big story of sin, in a nutshell. David violates three of the ten Commandments in his fall from grace. It’s springtime, and David’s army is out pillaging and plundering the Ammonites. But David has stayed behind. He’s a king after all; he no longer needs to be out on the battlefield proving himself, eating rations, missing a bath, sleeping on rocky ground. So, one afternoon, perhaps bored out of his mind, while up on the palace roof, David looks down into one of the courtyards and sees the exquisitely beautiful Bathsheba, wife of soldier Uriah, who is off fighting in David’s army. (Sin #1, “Thou shalt not covet your neighbor’s wife.”) David sees Bathsheba; he sends for Bathsheba; and he takes her to bed. David sins against her, then discards her and sends Bathsheba home. (Sin #2, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”)

Eventually, Bathsheba sends word to King David that she’s now pregnant. David attempts to cover-up his actions by bringing Uriah back from battle, hoping that Uriah will sleep with his wife. David even gets Uriah drunk in an effort to facilitate this, but to no avail. Uriah, whose name in Hebrew means “Yahweh is my Light,” is too loyal, too faithful to enjoy pleasures on the homefront, while his fellow soldiers are out on the battlefront. Seeing no other scheming alternative, David deliberately sends Uriah back to the vicious, bloody frontline. Uriah is killed the next day. Upon hearing this news, David sends for Bathshe-
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ba and marries her. (Sin #3, “Thou shalt not murder.”) The last verse of 2 Samuel 11 ends with these words: “This thing which David had done was evil in the eyes of Yahweh” (v.27b). David has now reached the messy “point of no return.” David’s life and, subsequently, the life of Israel, will never be the same. We aren’t prepared for such a David, but such is the way of sin and how it so often happens—“gradually and unobtrusively,” until sin overwhelms and overtakes (Peterson, p.183).

Hear the good-news again: Sin might well be our only hope, because recognizing and naming that something is wrong are the first steps toward making it right. You and I could spend a bunch of time right now fixating on David’s sinning by condemning him, by writing him off. We could point our accusing finger at him and tell him what a wretched sinner David is. OR we could get honest and real and recognize and name the sin, not just in David, but in each one of us. All of what David did here points to his out-of-control desire to become a god himself. He wanted to take charge of his own life and the lives of others, paying no mind to the God who has been with David every step of the way. We do this, too. Like David, our God-avoidance is fed by our own god-pretensions. Like David, when I sin it’s because I am wanting to become more, while making God less.

At this point in the story, David might have thought he was going to get away with the sex-and-murder. But sin catches up with him, as it does for us. Just when we might think David is off scott-free, his pastor Nathan shows up. Nathan confronts David; actually, Nathan baits David by telling him a parable, a story about a rich man. The rich man has lots and lots of sheep, and he needs a lamb for a dinner party he’s hosting. But instead of taking a succulent lamb from one of his many flocks, Nathan explains (as David listens intently), the rich man takes the pet lamb of a simple, poor man living down the street. The rich man kills the poor man’s lamb and serves it up to his guests.

It’s outrageous behavior. The rich man is heartless and callous. He has abused and exploited the poor man. David thinks so, and so David, taking on the role of a righteous judge, shouts out and sentences the rich man to death. “I’d like to give that selfish SOB what he deserves,” David must be thinking. Once the story is told, and once David reacts to the rich man’s cruelty, Nathan puts it to David, “You are that man!” The rich man took by force, and David has taken by force.

Here’s where we finally pick up our Scripture, 2 Samuel 12:7-15: Nathan said to David,
“You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. [So] 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. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within 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 very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan said to David, “Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die.” Then Nathan went (home) to his house.

David comes to his senses. Nathan confronts David personally – “You are the man!” – and now David answers God personally: “I have sinned against the Lord.” All of a sudden it’s useless to pass judgment on some fictitious rich man. Staring into the proverbial mirror David sees that HE is this man, and he has no place to hide. David now recognizes who he is before God—a person messed up, who needs help, who is desperate for God—David, a sinner. I am that man; you are that man, that woman. Sin is our only hope, because recognizing and naming that something is wrong are our first steps in making something right.

So, three takeaways from David’s sin story. One - Get a Life; Two - Get Cleaned-Up; Three - Get a Nathan. One - Get a Life. Curiously, the trajectory of David’s sinning begins with David’s decision to stay home in Jerusalem that spring. Sitting around the palace David doesn’t really have much of a life, and it’s what gets him into trouble. He really needs to be out and about doing what kings do—staying active in battle, attending to the affairs of a nation, dreaming future plans for his royal family. But David stays home; he’s got too much time on his hands, to walk on palace roofs, to entertain temptations, to look to conquer something or someone else besides the Ammonites. David needs to get a life; but in stead, David is pulling back from life. In his first chapter, James captures where temptation leads. James 1:14-15: Don’t let any-one under pressure who gives into evil say, “God is trying to trip me up.” God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one’s way. The temptation to give into evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: [called] sin! Sin grows up
Get a Life.

Get a Life. Do you have healthy hobbies and interests which feed well your body and mind? Do you have activities and daily rhythms which nourish your soul? Do you find pleasure and meaning in healthy, life-giving relationships? Get a life, before temptation gets a grip on you.

Get Cleaned-Up.

Two - Get Cleaned-Up. Confession leads to penance, penance leads to repair and restoration with God and with others. For David to hear from Nathan about God’s grace and forgiveness, David first needs to see his sin, and then respond with a repentant heart. This is true of us, too. We too often jump right to God’s lavish grace before we recognize and name our need for grace. Grace given from God becomes cheapened if our sinning before God isn’t confessed and fully owned. The way David gets “cleaned-up” is by taking responsibility for what he has done. “I have sinned against the Lord,” David confesses. He names his coveting, his adultery, the murder. David names the great distance he’s put between himself and God. He sees that his sin has cut him off from the fuller, richer life with God that he has once had.

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Three - Get a Nathan. Where would David have been without Nathan? Could David’s life have gotten any worse? With all his amassed power and increasing selfishness and greed? Yes, David could have fallen deeper into shame, fear, and desperation.

David trusts Nathan and, with that trust, Nathan calls David out and helps him see himself for who is has become. More broken and painful than abusing Bathsheba and deceiving Uriah, and killing him, is the reality that David has violated God. The man described as a “man after God’s own heart” has stood defiantly against God and has broken God’s heart.

Get a Nathan. I’ve got mine, and have for many years. There was George, and Z-Man, and now Ron. If you don’t have one, get a Nathan, for whatever unhealthy, harmful thing that is or has taken hold of you. Come to one of us pastors; ask for a Stephen Minister; someone in your covenant group; a Renewing Prayer minister. Three things:


David’s enormous sins were wildly outdone by God’s grace. His sinning cannot, must not be minimized. But David’s sinning is minuscule compared to God’s salvation from all that David did. God’s grace is bigger, wider, deeper than David’s sins. Composing Psalm 51 was David’s cleansing response to God, where David recognizes and names his sin and shame. And David composed another Psalm, after Psalm 51—Psalm 32. Psalm 32 is called the Joy of Forgiveness: “You are a hiding place for me, O God; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance….Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

Get a Nathan.