

Confronting Sin

2Samuel 12:1-15a

I vividly remember an occasion of being called out by my grade school volleyball coach.

He was a pretty competitive guy which is why he took great exception to my comment coming out of the change room for a game.

We were going up against a pretty good team and as we were walking out onto the court one of my teammates said to me, “Where going to win this game.”

I responded with, “I think we are going to lose!” and the coach heard me say it.

I’ll tell you what, he gave me a death stare that struck fear right into my heart.

I tried to make up for it with maximum effort, but that didn’t work.

Even though we won the game he was still visibly upset with me after the game.

He actually put me on the bench for two games after that.

If only that were the end of the story.

It was about three weeks later after we had lost a couple of games in a row the coach asked the team in the dressing room, “What’s the problem guys?”

No one said anything. After a few seconds he looks right at me and asks, “Mike, what do you think?”

If I had an ounce of sense I would have said, “I don’t know coach.”

Instead I said, “I think some guys don’t believe we can win.”

Not a smart thing to say. He called me out in front of the whole team reminding me of what I had said coming out of the change room and few weeks before.

Being confronted like that was not a fun experience, but you know what it was good for me.

It gave me a good dose of humility and it made me a better teammate in the long run.

[That is one of a number of times I’ve experienced something like that where people point out something wrong in my thinking or behaviour. I can’t say that I have ever enjoyed situations like that, but I can say that they have been often been good for me. I’m guessing most of us have had those kind of experiences in life. We find something similar happening in our text this morning **2Samuel 12:1-15a**. It is an extremely serious situation. The king of God’s choosing has grievously sinned and God sends His prophet to confront him. This is another challenging chapter, but it has some very important lessons for us. The first thing we see in this text is a lesson that I fear many have forgotten these days. It is that...]

Point #1 – God wants the sin of His people confronted. (Verse 1-4)

Because the LORD is loving and faithful He calls out the wrongdoing of those that belong to Him.

Listen to the opening words of chapter twelve, “And the LORD sent Nathan to David”.

Commentator Ronald Youngblood sees something important in the word ‘sent’.

It is a word that is used many times in chapter 11.

David ‘sent’ and inquired about Bathsheba, he ‘sent’ and had her brought to him, she ‘sent’ news that a child had been conceived, David ‘sent’ to have Uriah sent to him, David ‘sent’ a murderous letter to Joab by the hand of Uriah, Joab ‘sent’ a messenger to tell David that his desire had been carried out, David ‘sent’ and had Bathsheba brought to his house to become his wife.

There is a great deal of sending in chapter eleven and almost all of it has to do with people (David being the most prominent) exercising their power and position for the purpose of doing evil.

Now God is sending His prophet to King David.

The King of Kings is exercising His power to confront evil. **(Verse 1-4)**

Nathan chooses to begin with a story.

It is a parable which is clearly intended to press into the conscience of the king.

The main characters are a poor man and a rich man.

The abundance of the rich man is portrayed in the ‘many flocks and herds’ he possesses.

David, having the background of a shepherd, knew as well as anyone the value of livestock.

God had taken him from the field where he put his life on the line to protect his father’s sheep and had set him on the throne of Israel to watch over the LORD’s people.

In the process God had made David very successful and wealthy.

The poor man’s lowly situation is highlighted by the fact that he “had nothing but one little ewe-lamb (that is a very young female lamb), which he had bought.”

He raised the lamb, let it eat part of his meal and drink right out of his cup.

Nathan says the lamb was “like a daughter to him.”

I agree with commentators who suggest that Nathan intends that line to be like a spot light on David’s sin.

It is a way of saying, “The parable is about you and Uriah.”

The word for ‘daughter’ in Hebrew is the word “Bath” and the name of Uriah’s wife is “Bathsheba” (daughter of an oath).

Nathan is tipping his hand here that this is not about a poor man's lamb, but about Uriah's wife.

The prophet continues with the story telling the king that a traveller comes to visit the rich man.

In this culture someone coming for company meant putting on a feast for the guest.

Instead of taking out of his extreme abundance the rich man takes the poor man's lamb and has supper prepared.

The point of emphasis is clearly on the callous greed of the rich man because that is what Nathan has been sent to confront David over.

It has been about a year since the king had committed his crimes.

Psalm 32 suggests David had struggled with inward guilt over his evil, but outwardly he carried on like he had done nothing wrong.

God cannot let that continue.

The LORD had promised His covenant faithfulness to David back in chapter seven.

The whole goal of His promises is to overcome sin and death and so to do nothing here would be to deny that and by extension deny His own goodness which thankfully is impossible for Him to do.

Therefore, He sends Nathan to confront the King.

Nothing has changed from then until now.

God still wants sin in the lives of His people confronted.

Matthew 18:15 says, "...if your brothers sins against you go and show him his fault."

Luke 17:3, "...If your brother sins, rebuke him..."

1Timothy 5:20, "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them..."

That is no easy task and it is one that we can get terribly wrong.

We don't come as judges with the power to condemn, we come as servants of the LORD under the authority of God's Word.

If we get that wrong then we will end up adding to our own sins rather than doing the necessary work of confronting sin.

[This is no easy task but it is an important one among the people of God. What we have to see is that the LORD is being gracious and loving towards us when our sin is confronted. If He just ignores it, if we are allowed to keep on pretending like it never happened or like it is no big deal, then it will continue to have a negative impact on our lives. We see one of the ways that

can happen here in how David responds to Nathan's parable. He has been hiding his wickedness for a long time at this point and that creates something bad in his heart. It is something that commonly happens when we don't acknowledge our failings. David's reply here shows us that...]

Point #2 – Unrepentant sin often produces hypocrisy. (Verses 5-6)

It is easy to see the wrongdoing that we are guilty of in the lives of others and ignore it in our own.

As we read this aware of the bigger story it is obvious to us that Nathan's parable is not really about a rich man stealing a poor man's sheep.

David though initially fails to see himself in the story.

So much time has passed, no one else has challenged his actions, and the text gives us no indication that he has any idea that Nathan knows what he has done.

He thinks this is literally about a lamb that got stolen.

Look at his reaction at the beginning of **verse 5** (stop at 'the man').

The Hebrew phrase that expresses his anger here is interesting.

Most literally translated it is "David was exceedingly hot in the face" or "hot in the nostril".

Most of us have likely experienced this and seen it on the face of others.

A flush face, clenched teeth, and maybe a vein starting to pop out of the forehead.

Nobody in the room has to wonder what the king is feeling, he's extremely angry, but not with himself.
(Verse 5-6)

The phrase 'As the LORD lives' is commonly used in the scriptures as part of taking an oath.

It is a way to speak of the absolute sureness of something. God always lives constant and unchanging in His Being.

Just as sure as God always is Who He is, "the man deserves to die."

He is absolutely right, but not in the way he thinks. He is the one who deserves to die and he has added to his sin here by showing contempt for the Name of the LORD in his hypocrisy.

David also shows his knowledge of the law in what he says should happen.

He says the rich man must restore the lamb fourfold which is what is commanded in Exodus 22:1.

He knows the law and is extremely angry at how it has been violated by the man in the parable, while he himself is guilty of worse.

He also is upset by the rich man's lack of pity/compassion and yet he showed none for Uriah or the other men that died on account of his evil.

He is beside himself with anger at someone else for the very things he is guilty of.

[We see this all the time don't we. The one that always gets me is the climate change meetings that make it onto the news. You have hundreds of people who would lecture people about eating a hamburger and driving a truck to work who think nothing of flying across the world in a private jet to eat \$1000lb steak together. The hypocrisy is intolerable.]

Want to make a thief angry? Steal from him!

A gossip that finds out someone else is talking about them behind their back will be upset.

Cheat a cheater and see what they do!

How often is that sort of thing happening in our lives?

How often do we get angry with people for the exact same things that we are guilty of?

[That is what harboring evil in our hearts will do. If we break God's law and we ignore our conscience, if we think we have succeeded in hiding our evil, if we justify our wickedness, then we will become self-righteous which is not righteous at all. We will excuse ourselves and condemn others. It is a terrible state to be in. Thank God if by His grace that evil is confronted in us. That's why the LORD sent Nathan to David. The king is in terrible shape here spiritually speaking and the prophet is about to lay the hammer down upon him and show him that he hasn't gotten away with it. He is going to show him that...]

Point #3 – Sin always has consequences. (Verses 7-12)

It is impossible to break God's moral laws without experiencing some kind of effect.

In one of the most dramatic lines in the Old Testament, Nathan stands before the hot faced angry king and says, "You are the man!"

The man you think deserves to die, the man you think has acted so horribly, you're him!

We can only imagine what must have gone through David's mind at that moment, but it must have been quite the change from what he was thinking and feeling when he thought this was about someone else.

Having identified David as the criminal, he proceeds to read the verdict from the courtroom of heaven. **(Verse 7b-9)**

God's message for the king starts with a reminder of how he got to the throne in the first place.

When the LORD sent Samuel to Jesse's house to anoint the man who would follow Saul as king of Israel, all of David's older brothers stood before the prophet and were rejected.

Samuel has to ask Jesse, "Are all of your sons here?"

Jesse says, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep."

No one in the house even thought to bring David in from the field because why would anyone pick him?

If not for the sovereign choice of Almighty God, David would have remained a common man.

And what about all the life threatening situations that came his way from Saul, why did he survive those? Because God delivered him.

God delivered him and gave him all the possessions of the king before him.

God says, "If that wasn't enough I would add to you as much more."

There was no shortfall in all that the LORD had given to David, so Nathan asks "Why have you despised the word of the LORD?"

What David had done was not a mistake made in ignorance, he knew God's word and willfully disobeyed it.

What excuse could he offer? Not one!

Here is the consequence (**Verses 10-12**)

At the time David chose to 'despise' the LORD and His Word, he was at the high mark of his reign.

All the indications were he was all set to enjoy a long period of peace, but because he embraced the sword of the Ammonites in his wicked scheme, the sword (representing war and conflict) would remain with him.

Not only that, the evil he thought he had done in secret would be done to him in public.

It is important for us to understand properly what it means when God says in verse 12 He "will raise up evil" against David.

How does the LORD do that when He Himself never does anything evil?

To understand that we have to understand the nature of human beings.

In our fallen condition it is the natural inclination of people to do evil rather than good.

If you doubt that read Romans 3:9-18.

Why then do people do morally good things? Why isn't the world much worse than it is?

The answer is that the LORD, through various means, restricts the evil of the human heart according to His grace.

The reason why we are not all as bad as we possibly could be is because God, in His providential kindness, restricts our evil.

What then does he have to do to raise up evil for the purpose of judgement?

He simply stops restricting it.

When David's son betrays his father and acts in the wickedness that these verses describe the LORD will simply be allowing him to do what he wants.

He will take away His protecting grace and David will suffer greatly because of it on account of his despising the LORD.

When we don't listen to God bad things happen.

[Anybody here this morning own a car that has warning lights on the dash? When a light comes on in the dash you sort of have two options. You can get black electrical tape and cover over the light or you can address the problem. Some lights can't be ignored. If the low fuel light comes on and you keep driving you will end up stranded. There is no way around it there will be a consequence for that choice.]

We know that is true in so many situations in life and it is certainly true when it comes to ignoring the word of God.

If someone is a liar are we surprised when people don't believe them?

If someone is a thief are we surprised when they get blamed for something that has gone missing?

If a person is self-centered and selfish are we surprised when people don't want to be around them?

We should not be surprised when we experience the consequences of disobeying God.

[Listen, the bible says we are all guilty of breaking God's laws (Romans 3:23). If we are all guilty, that means we all deserve consequences. The bible says that the consequence for sin is death and eternal judgement. That is what David deserves here, he deserves the sentence that he thought the sheep stealer should get. Something else happens instead and shows us that...]

Point #4 – Confrontation that results in confession leads to hope. (Verses 13-15a)

Instead of immediate judgment and condemnation, the LORD rebukes those that belong to Him so that they might turn from evil and find forgiveness.

One of the things that we should appreciate about this situation is that Nathan's life could very easy have been at risk here.

We see more than once in the Bible where prophets confront kings and queens and an attempt is made on their life.

David could have very easily said, “I am the king, who are you to talk to me like that?”

He could have tried to lie further and deny what Nathan had said.

Instead of doing things like that we read this in **verse 13**.

He confesses.

He admits that he is guilty before God.

That is why the LORD sent Nathan in the first place.

While it would have been just for God to put David to death for what he had done, the LORD shows the king His covenant faithfulness and love and graciously confronts his sin instead.

It is also really important to notice that there is nothing David can do here to erase his sin or make up for it on his own.

He cannot take back his adultery and he cannot take back his murder.

But notice again what it says here. When David confesses Nathan says to him “The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

David’s confession opens the way for forgiveness.

One might get the impression here that God’s forgiveness is just a matter of sweeping it all under the rug and forgetting about what has happened.

We know that cannot be the case, because that is what David had been doing and that is the whole reason God sent Nathan to confront the king.

Listen God doesn’t ignore sin, He deals with it according to His justice.

That is what the cross of Christ is all about.

Jesus who is totally innocent stands in the place of the guilty, He suffers the penalty of God’s wrath satisfying God’s perfect justice so that those who confess their sin can be forgiven.

That hope isn’t possible if we hold on to our sin, it isn’t possible if we hide it or ignore it.

It is only possible if we acknowledge it.

David finds that hope here, but he is still going to have to endure terrible grief. (**Verse 14-15a**)

Admittedly this is a tough verse to read.

The boy has taken no conscious actions against the laws of God and yet he dies instead of David.

Why? I don’t know, the text doesn’t explain God’s decision it just gives us God’s decision.

It could be that this is the means by which God keeps David from having a small view of his sin and a cheap view of God's grace.

It could be that this is God's mercy in the life of the baby boy. God on occasion in the bible uses death to spare people from hardship.

What if this boy grew up ridiculed and rejected and that turned him against the LORD.

Is it not better to die in infancy and be with the LORD then perish under God's eternal wrath?

Of course all of that is speculation.

Here is what we have to understand.

God has sovereignty over all that He has created and He governs everyone and everything in perfect justice.

Is it so hard to accept that we might not understand every decision He makes?

Is it so hard to accept that He doesn't owe us an explanation?

Is it so hard to believe that God is defeating sin in all that He does for the highest good of his people?

That is the whole reason that confession leads to hope?

If it wasn't for that, what would be the point in confronting sin?

Look it is never an easy task to talk to someone about things in their life that aren't right.

It is hard to imagine Nathan hearing from the LORD on this and thinking, man I just can't wait to go and see David about his sin.

It is hard but God commands it for the good of his people.

It is also not easy to be the one being confronted. Most often we want to stop up our ears or respond in anger.

Failing to speak to one another and refusing to listen never does any good.

God wants better for us and individuals and as the church as a whole.

He wants to keep us from filling our hearts with hypocrisy.

He wants us to feel the weight of consequence so that we won't treat these things lightly.

Finally, He confronts us to lead us to confession which leads us to hope.

Praise the Lord that what He does for David in this text He does for everyone that belongs to Him.

Oh that we would listen and live.