

Proceeding Into Evil

2Samuel 11:1-27

Listen to what commentator Matthew Henry writes regarding the text that is before us this morning.

He says, “We wish we could draw a veil over it, and it might never be known, might never be said, that David did such things as are here recorded of him. But it cannot, it must not, be concealed. The scripture is faithful in relating the faults even of those whom it most applauds, which is an instance of the sincerity of the penmen, and an evidence that it was not written to serve any party: even such stories as these “were written for our learning,” that “he that thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall,” and that others’ harm may be our warning... ..Let him that readeth understand what the best of men are when God leaves them to themselves.”

My heart resonates with Henry’s assessment of this passage.

It is not an easy read, but the Bible does not cover over the failings of people which speaks to its authenticity and trustworthiness.

While we would expect better of David knowing his professed love for the LORD, we see clearly in him that the snare of sin can trap anyone who becomes careless towards it.

I have seen this happen on several occasions in my time as a believer.

I have seen people who profess to know Christ fall into the worst of evil and I have seen the great destruction that it causes.

I fear most of us have had that experience.

I clearly remember the first time someone I knew had made a dumpster fire of their life and the lives of those around them.

I remember feeling a bit shaken by it all and I remember the words of my pastor at the time.

He said, “Mike, don’t put your hope in people because they will disappoint you. Put your hope in the LORD.”

He also said, “Always remember, sin makes you a fool.”

[I have found that both of those statements have proved true time and again over the years and we can see that here is **2Samuel chapter 11**. In David’s failure there are a number of important warnings for us about walking down the path of wickedness and if we are wise we will take them to heart as a safeguard for our lives. If we follow David’s pattern here we will end up in the same place, but if by God’s grace we can see the danger then we can be spared from it. The first thing that is made clear to us in this text is that...]

Point #1 – Believers proceed into evil through willful choices. (Verses 1-5)

When someone who claims to know the LORD does something that leads to ruin it is no mere stumbling, but instead the result of a series of decisions both big and small.

At the opening of chapter eleven we find David at the highpoint of his reign as King of Israel.

Years of conflict within Israel had come to an end and the LORD had granted him great success against enemies outside the country.

One such external enemy was the kingdom of the Ammonites.

Israel's army, under the command of Joab (David's nephew), had already had a victory over the Ammonites and the beginning of chapter eleven describes the continuation of that battle.

It is here that we see the first of David's bad choices. (**Verse 1**)

In the past David had faithfully gone out with the army, but here he decides to sit things out.

So his first bad decision is not being where he is supposed to be.

His choices continue in **verse 2**.

Instead of being on the battle field or tending to matters of administration and justice, we find the king idle upon his couch.

Of course rest is not a bad thing in and of itself, but the picture here seems to be self-indulgence rather than being weary.

When he gets up from his rest he walks around his roof, which is the ancient world's version of a back porch or deck.

The king's palace would have been the tallest roof in town which meant that he would have been able to look upon the roofs and courtyards of all his neighbors.

As he is looking he sees something that he shouldn't and instead of looking away he fixes his gaze.

We know he fixes his gaze because he looks plenty long enough to make an evaluation of what he is seeing.

He keeps going verse 3.

He made a conscious choice to inquire about the woman which he had no business doing at all.

This choice, I believe, is the fruit of earlier bad choices in his life.

He had chosen to marry multiple wives which is against God's design and so he feels free here to make the inquiry.

The servant comes back with the news that Bathsheba is "the wife of Uriah the Hittite"

David knows God's commands, he knows she is off limits, and still he doesn't stop.

In verses 4-5 we are told that he has her brought to him and violates the sacred covenant of marriage and that there is now unavoidable evidence of his sin for which he should face the most severe of consequences.

He didn't get there all at once. There are at least six opportunities here for him to turn away, but he keeps going choosing to take another step on the path of evil.

[When people make a mess of their lives it is rarely if ever a matter of stumbling or momentary lapse in judgment. It is a series of willful choices to take another step towards wickedness. No doubt David justified himself along the way. No doubt the success and power that the LORD has granted him diluted his thinking. No doubt the same thing can happen to us if we fail to see the importance of all the choices we make in life. David's sin here happens because he makes a

series of willful decisions. That pattern persists after he sends Bathsheba on her way. When it becomes clear that his great moral failing will become public, he does what many people do when they find themselves in such a situation. He tries to hide what he has done, but we find in his example what always turns out to be true. We find that...]

Point #2 – Deceitful attempts to cover up evil will fail. (Verses 6-13)

Trying to hide serious moral failure doesn't work.

When David gets the news that he will be found out for what he has done, he very quickly takes steps to hide his actions.

In verses 6-7 it says that David sends a message to Joab to have Uriah come to Jerusalem from the battle front and when Uriah gets there the king asks him how things are going at Rabbah.

There is a chance this request struck Joab as strange.

We know from 2Samuel 23 that Uriah is listed among David's mighty men.

Why would the king send for one of the best soldiers in the army?

No doubt Uriah was scratching his head a bit when the king just asked him about how the war was going.

Surely there were others who would be better suited for such a menial task.

But the king asked for Uriah and a good soldier does what the king requires.

The contrast between the honour of Uriah and the sin of David is powerful and serves to highlight all the more how terrible this evil is.

After the report is given, David says "Go home and wash your feet" and he sends a "present" after him.

He no doubt believes Bathsheba will be just as interested in covering up the situation as he is.

Uriah though chooses to remain at the king's door with his fellow servants.

David, clearly disappointed with that failure asks Uriah in verse 10, "Why did you not go down to your house?"

Let's look together at Uriah's response in **verse 11**.

This response should have cut David to the heart. He had said similar things throughout his life.

Clearly Uriah is a godly man which is amazing when we consider his background.

Multiple times Uriah is referred to as "Uriah the Hittite".

The Hittites were foreigners, they descended from Canaan the grandson of Noah and those people groups were godless for the most part.

Uriah's name though means "Yahweh in my light."

Somehow this guy had come to know, love, and serve the true God and displays his heart in these matter through self-denial.

He denies himself what he has the right to enjoy in contrast with David's self-indulgence in wickedness.

David rather than confessing, tries again.

In verses 12-13 he tells Uriah to stay another day, succeeds in getting him drunk hoping that his impaired judgment would lead him to his home, but that doesn't work either.

It is a great mistake to think that we can cover up evil.

[We've have all probably seen a TV show, or know a parent in real life who has accidentally killed their child's pet hamster. Now the right thing to do is confess, but what often happens is the parent goes to the pet store and buys a new hamster that looks like the expired one. What invariably happens is the child comes home takes one look and says, "That is not my hamster."]

It is our nature to try and hide our evil and the more serious our offense generally the harder we try.

It may work for a time, but in the end it will fail.

We try and hide it for fear of consequence and judgement.

Here is the thing, it doesn't work and it is a terrible way to live.

The Gospel of Christ shows us a better way.

Confession, repentance, and forgiveness because Jesus died in our place and rose again.

The gospel invites us, by the transforming power of forgiveness and grace to live like there is nothing in our lives that we are scared of people finding out about.

[The gospel is a constant invitation to get off the path of wickedness. There is no need to keep trying to cover up evil, but every reason to say, "I'm not going to take another step down this road!" We need to heed that warning brothers and sisters because if we don't we are going to be finding ourselves doing what David does next in this text. He presses on with trying to hide what he has done and he shows us that...]

Point #3 – Trying to cover up evil leads to more evil. (Verses 14-17)

When someone works to escape the consequences of their wrong doing they will often do worse things in the process.

Again we see a powerful contrast between the faithfulness and integrity of Uriah and the wickedness of David's actions. (Verses 14-17)

If Uriah had any inkling that something was up here, he does not let that impede his sense of loyalty to the king of God's choosing.

David knows he won't open the letter.

How cruel is that to send the man's death sentence by his own hand?

In order for this to work, David can't just get out a sword and put an end to Uriah, because then everyone will see him as a murderer and the adultery that he is trying to cover up will become public anyway.

His solution is to get the Ammonites to do the dirty work.

There is a huge amount of irony in David's plan.

This is exactly what Saul had tried to do to David many years before.

When the LORD had given David success and he had won the favour of the people, Saul sent him on as many dangerous missions as he could come up with hoping that the Philistines would put an end to the son of Jesse.

David knows what it is like to have an evil man seek his life for unjust reasons and yet for the sake of trying to cover up his own evil he presses into further evil.

Then there is Joab. David knows well the kind of man he is which is why he sends the letter.

Remember when David's life was in jeopardy? Jonathan came to his aid to save his life because he put godliness above obedience to his father.

Joab knows Uriah and has fought alongside him, he knows his faithfulness and integrity, and yet he raises no questions or concerns about the king's request.

Joab has to know that if Uriah was guilty of something deserving death, then he would simply be executed.

He has to know that the intent here is murderous and yet he does what he is asked.

I think the reason he is so quick to agree is that he himself is guilty of murder and is happy to have the ability to hang the same thing over David's head.

Uriah being the faithful and valiant man he is, obeys Joab's orders and dies along with some others for no reason other than to try and hide the guilt of the king.

Let's think through the progression of evil here.

Being passive about his responsibility, leads to self-indulgent laziness, which leads to coveting, which leads to adultery, which leads to deception, which leads to murder.

That is what happens when we try and cover up sin, we more often than not end up sinning more.

[If we think, "I'll just take one step and then stop!" Odds are we won't. Odds are if we take one step we will take another and by the time we get to the cover up phase we are willing to do far more than we would have ever thought. There is only one way to stop proceeding down the path of evil and that is confession, repentance, and faith. It is through applying the power of the gospel to everyday life. Let's not be people who try and live in darkness and hide evil. Let's be people who live in the light of God's grace. Without that we will just go farther down the path of sin which has another consequence besides doing more evil. We can see that consequence when the news of Uriah's death is reported back to David. The king's reaction show us that...]

Point #4 – Proceeding into evil desensitizes the heart to evil. (Verses 18-25)

The farther down the path of wickedness someone travels the less likely they are to care about the pain and destruction caused by their actions.

With the task of the king's letter fulfilled, Joab reports back to David. (Verses 18-22)

The messenger does not know the details of what has been happening behind the scenes so he doesn't appreciate fully the message Joab wants him to give to David.

There is more to the example from Israel's history than merely a guy got to close to a city wall and got a rock dropped on his head.

This is a veiled message likely intended to deceive the messenger and also say something to David.

The Abimelech that Joab is referring to in verse 21 is the son of Jerubbesheth, who is better known as Gideon.

Gideon had seventy sons and after his death Abimelech conspires with some 'worthless and reckless fellows' and kills all of his brothers except one so that he can attain a position of power.

His reign was short lived and ended in battle when a woman dropped a millstone on his head from a city wall.

If the messenger knew nothing of David's sin and Joab's participation in the murder then he might take that to mean that Uriah had done something a got what he deserved by being too close to the wall.

But who is more like Abimelech in this situation Uriah or David?

Uriah has been faithful in the extreme, it is David who has been treacherous.

Choosing this particular example from history is a veiled way of saying, "David, you are a treacherous murderer and we both know it."

While the account of Abimelech is not repeated in verses 23-24, the phrase in verse 22 which says the messenger "told David *all* that Joab sent him to tell" strongly suggests the messenger relayed that part of the message too.

Now let's look at David's reaction (Verse 25).

There is more blood on the king's hands than that of Uriah.

We are not given a number for the casualties here, but it's plural.

These are men described as 'valiant' in verse 16 and they have lost their lives because David is trying to hide his wickedness.

Multiple time in this book David mourns over the death of people?

He mourned over people who had tried to kill him, but here for people who had faithfully served him, for people he had fought alongside in the past he sheds no tears.

There is no mention of any kind of sorrow. His message back to Joab basically says, "Don't worry about it that is the way things go, carry on!"

Walking down the path of evil has clearly deadened his heart.

[Anyone who has ever worked hard at manual labor has developed callouses on their hands. I remember my first day working for a big electrical contractor wiring a big apartment building. I got the job of tying all the wires into electrical boxes. The wiring was metal cables and to get the wire in the box you have to take the metal exterior off the cable. That is hard on the hands and after the first day my hands were pretty blistered. By the end of the first month those blisters had turned to callouses and I no longer felt the pain of the metal cable.]

That is a helpful thing if you work with your hands, but that is a terrible thing to happen with your heart towards evil.

How does a man who loves God like David end up caring so little that men have lost their lives in his service?

He deadened his heart with sin and persisted in trying to cover it up.

[We are no different. The same thing will happen to us if we try to hide in darkness. We will get used to it and as we do it will be easier and easier to do things that God hates. Trying to hide our sin never does any good and if we have any sense of Who God is and what He is like then we should remind ourselves that hiding our moral failings is a useless endeavor. We can see that here at the end of this chapter as we are reminded that...]

Point #5 – Evil is never hidden from the LORD. (Verses 26-27)

While people may appear at times to get away with immorality, no one ever does.

When David receives news that his instructions have been carried out he is at best indifferent about Uriah's death but more likely than not he is on some level pleased with the news.

He is not the only one who hears the news (**Verse 26**).

Some commentators have labelled Bathsheba a willing participant in David's sin and others have suggested that what happened took place against her will.

The actual text gives us little in either direction and that is intentional.

Plenty of people failed in this text.

Why were none of the servants involved courageous enough to say to the king, "Don't do this?"

Why does Joab go along with something so serious even though it is clearly wrong?

There were multiple opportunities for people to intervene, but none of their failures alleviate David from any responsibility.

That is why I believe the text is vague about Bathsheba. No matter what she does there is no excuse for David.

Everything that happens between them is his responsibility.

While it is possible that her lamenting here is simply a cultural formality, there is nothing in the text to suggest that.

She seems genuinely grieved at Uriah's death which would be consistent with the meaning of her name. Bathsheba means "Daughter of an oath" indicating faithfulness.

Then we read this in **verse 27a** (stop at 'bore him a son').

The fact that there were multiple servants with inside information meant that this could never be a total cover up.

Also, the timing of the boy's birth would perhaps raise questions in the odd person's mind, but for the most part this would work in the eyes of most of the people.

In fact, though this would look kind of weird in our culture, at that time what happens here might be looked on as an act of kindness.

Many people might say, "Look at how good our king is, he is taking in the wife of that brave soldier who died in his service to comfort her and take care of her."

Yes there might be some people who ask some questions but by and large the timing was such that David could at least appear to have done nothing wrong.

There is no tearing of his clothes, or shedding tears, or speaking words of lament.

Other people are left to mourn the dead while David believes his plan has worked.

Look with me at the **end of verse 27**.

God saw it all!

Now someone might say, "Then why didn't the LORD stop it?"

It is amazing how quickly we want to blame God for our own evil!

Yes the LORD has the power to prevent evil, but in His wisdom He allows it to happen and He does not explain to us the finer details of every decision He makes.

He does not tell us why He restrains in one circumstance and permits in another.

What He does tell us is that He is both sovereign and just.

No evil escapes His view and no evil escapes His justice.

God knows everything we have ever done, thought, and felt that shows contempt for Him.

It is the height of foolishness to be satisfied with trying to fool people.

It is not before men that we will stand and be judged for all eternity, it is before a holy, all knowing, all powerful, all present, perfectly just God that we must give an account.

There is no whitewash that can help us. We cannot hide nor escape.

The only hope we have is to be washed in the blood of the Lamb.

What can we do to hide our sin? Nothing.

What has God done to deal with our sin? He sent His perfect Son to make us right with Him through His death and resurrection.

The truth is we are all like David, we have all made willful choices to walk down the path of evil to one degree or another, and we have all tried to cover up our sin which has led us into more trouble.

Praise God that He softens calloused hearts, praise God that He has provided a saviour, praise God that by His grace He stops us from proceeding farther into evil and calls us by the power of the gospel to the way of life.

May He do that for us to the eternal praise of his glorious grace.