



Do You Really Know the King?

A Study in Samuel

David and The Prophet

2 Samuel 12:1-13

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith

on Sunday, October 16th, 2022

Grandpa's Cough

I attended the First Baptist Church of Enid Oklahoma as a teenager. It was long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away. The youth would sit in the second, third, and fourth rows. My grandparents would sit behind those rows and occasionally they would sit behind me. One Sunday in high school, I was sitting next to my friend Steve, the pastor's kid. The sermon was getting underway, and Steve and I found something wonderfully funny, and it was all we could think about. Sadly, what it was specifically has been lost through the mists of time. And then I heard it. Grandpa coughed. It wasn't a genuine cough, cough. It was a corrective attitude adjustment cough. It was a throat clearing that really meant, "Boy, stop acting the fool."

I heard the cough, immediately recognized it for what it was and had enough sense to change what I was thinking. I diverted my attention from whatever distraction was back onto the sermon. I also lowered my head penitently and sighed heavily, raising and lowering my shoulders. It was my nonverbal way to express, "Grandpa, I'm sorry I am a moron."

In the middle of our rebellions, both silly and significant, when we are refusing to repent, God will get our attention and bring corrective action. I invite you to read about perhaps the most famous correction in Scripture. It is found in 2 Samuel 12. (read text)

You're the Man

How does someone challenge nearly absolute power? How does a prophet confront a king? How does a prophet correct a king who has assumed so much power? Will God allow this abuse to stand? Will David be like Saul and the other kings surrounding Israel? 2 Samuel 12 answers these questions. The answer comes quickly and with prophetic certainty.

Nathan the prophet speaks on God's behalf to David. This is the second time that Nathan has appeared without much explanation or fanfare.¹ But the arrival of a true prophet does not require much introduction. Nathan's appearance here continues the trend we see in 1 and 2 Samuel. These books recognize and highly value the power of God's word. These histories affirm both the preserving and rejuvenating power of God's word.

We see, once again, the return of the theme word *send*. "The Lord *sent* Nathan to David." David had sent, first in order to commit adultery, and then in order to cover up his crime. Standing on the outside looking in, it would appear as if David had gotten away with it. Some time has passed. Perhaps a year, or even two years. Just when it looks like David squeaked out of this mess, God does some sending of his own.

And to answer one of the earlier questions posed, "How does a prophet correct a king?" Well, it appears the best way to expose David's sin is to have David condemn himself. I understand how different it must've been for us to read the text so dramatically. To add such inflection and almost dramatize the text. One might say that such emotion is manipulative. That such emotion is intended to make us feel something. And you are absolutely right. Because that is exactly what Nathan did. He played on David's heartstrings. He shared a story sure to move the heart of a former shepherd.

The parable lights David's fuse against the rich man and David quickly condemns himself by condemning the rich man. Upon hearing that the rich man callously slaughtered the poor man's one little ewe lamb, David burned with anger. He quickly and decisively declares the rich man guilty and deserves death. However, the king will instead allow severe reparations as punishment.

Nathan does not waste any time coming to the point. "You are the man!" David's sin is now exposed. David despised or rejected God's word by committing evil in God's sight. Nathan's parable is a reminder to David and us that God sees what we do. God hears what we say. God knows our hearts and perceives those things inside of us that are imperceptible to everyone else.

¹ It is reminiscent of the prophet Elijah appearing suddenly in 1 Kings 17 out of nowhere. At least Elijah's birthplace is given.

I Gave You Everything

God then tells David that He gave David everything and yet David wants more. What's worse, he wants what wasn't rightfully his to take. God's punishment will match the crime. Since David used "the Ammonite's sword" to kill Uriah, the sword will never depart from his royal dynasty. Even worse, calamity, evil, will arise against David from within his own family. And all of it will play out very publicly in front of everyone. David whispered in the dark. God will shout it aloud in the light.

David's sin here will always be remembered. These terrible actions will always be recorded and whenever we teach, preach, and talk about David it is almost always framed with the mountaintop of the Goliath battle and the valley of shadow with Bathsheba and Uriah. However, we need to deal with David's response here to Nathan's parable.

First, let's not assume that all was sunshine, lollipops, and rainbows for David while he was enduring this. The "man after God's own heart" was struggling to come to terms with his own depravity. Had we been able to observe David, we might have been surprised with his coping. In Psalm 32, David writes about how guilt devoured his soul: "When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat."

David's response to the prophetic word of God reminds us why he was Israel's ideal king. David replies directly, "I have sinned against the Lord." It is genuine and remorseful. It is repentant. And God forgives David, takes away his sin, and preserves his life.

David doesn't deflect. He doesn't make excuses. He doesn't justify it. No equivocation. No blaming. No dodging. Let's be clear, here. David does not have to confess. Plenty of kings to follow would have just killed Nathan on the spot and have been done with it. David could've then asked for another prophet, one who would say "nice things" about him. Except that David wants to be what he has been called to be. And to actually be what God calls us to be requires us to confess and repent.

David repents not because he is caught. He confesses because it is the best way. There are several ways forward in dealing with sin when confronted by God. The best way was, is, and always will be repentance. That is the

difference between believers and unbelievers. Believers, true believers, take the best way forward of repentance.

Sin and Repentance

While the understanding of sin is more clearly defined in other passages of Scripture, it is clearly illustrated in 2 Samuel 11. We see the entire process from initial consideration of temptation through to sin and then full-blown cover up. David broke at least four commandments, more like five in 2 Samuel 11.

Likewise, the understanding of forgiveness and repentance are more clearly defined in other passages but nowhere are they illustrated more powerfully than 2 Samuel 12.

First, let's consider that our sin is defined simply. At the very core, at the very bottom of it, sin is simple. It doesn't take a rocket surgeon performing brain science to figure sin out. In our very nature, we are sinners, and we are predisposed to rebel against God's word and will and purpose for our lives. We don't need many words to get to the root of our sin. And the text here in 2 Samuel 11 and 12 economizes words as well.

In fact, you can define this entire account through six Hebrew words. Three statements each consisting of two words spoken by three of the four main characters of this story. "I'm pregnant." "You are the man!" "I have sinned against the Lord." Each of those statements are only two Hebrew words. And those six words not only symbolize this account, but they also remind us that, despite what we convince ourselves, sin is simple, and it is simply rejecting the authority of God's word.

First, we have Bathsheba's direct two-word message to David in chapter 11: "I'm pregnant."² Next, we have Nathan's two-word declaration, "You are the man."³ It is four words in English but just two words in Hebrew. Finally we have David's repentant confession, "I have sinned against the Lord."⁴ Six words in English but only two in Hebrew. These six words summarize the entire narrative.

² *Harah anoki* in Hebrew.

³ *Atta hais* in Hebrew.

⁴ *Hatati Yahweh* in Hebrew.

David's confession is direct, genuine and heartfelt. We understand this to be true because of the instant forgiveness extended to David by Nathan. What a beautiful promise – when we mean our repentance, God instantly forgives us and removes our sin from us.

Further in Psalm 32 David writes, “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” David understands and acknowledges and agrees with God that he has sinned. And in that moment, he chooses the best way forward of repentance. And God carries away his sin and cleanses him from unrighteousness.

I heard a preacher once say that Biblical repentance was changing what your mind resolutely is convinced of about what you believe to be true. It means changing how you think about your actions, your words, your thoughts, your motivations to a more Biblical understanding.⁵ Repentance is changing your mind about what you believe to align with God's word.

You see, belief impacts behavior. Your actions reveal your beliefs. David professed belief in God's sovereignty and sufficiency. But his actions in 2 Samuel 11 proved that he believed otherwise. Now, Nathan shares this parable and God is calling David to change his mind and heart about what he believes.

Evangelist Vance Havner was fond of saying, “What you live is what you really believe; everything else is just so much religious talk.” Your actions reveal your beliefs. For example, if you say you believe in tithing but then you don't tithe, then you don't really *believe* in it.

If you say that you believe God's word to be inspired and inerrant and infallible and the only authority upon which we should live our lives, and then you act counter to what God's word says, then you don't believe the Bible to be the ultimate authority. Further, our habitual pet sins have to be repented of and left behind. It is the best way forward.

It is flawed and failing logic to assume we can just move on from our sin without it being dealt with – as if there can be enough water to pass under the bridge. God won't allow David's sin to stand, and he won't allow ours to

⁵ It was in a sermon preached at a state convention by Dr. Daniel L. Akin, the president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

stand either. This isn't just a matter of God being the judge. This is an extension of God's grace, this not allowing our sin to stand. God provided His word and His Spirit to change us. The Bible wasn't written to satisfy our curiosity, it was written to transform our lives.⁶

God calls us to repent, to change our mind about our sin and turn away from it. David repents here. It is genuine and heartfelt. He is broken and he means it. He isn't just caught. He is remorseful.

Forgiveness in an Instant

David's repentance is genuine, and Nathan offers reassuring words that communicate a beautiful truth and promise to us. Nathan uses one of the gracious metaphors in the Old Testament concerning forgiveness: "The Lord has taken away your sin." Do you understand what that means? Forgiveness, in some beautiful, mysterious way, is spatial: Sin is removed, carried off to a great distance, never to be seen or heard from again. In fact, God won't even remember it because He has removed it from the repentant believer.

This truth illustrates for us one of the oldest truths about God. It comes from one of Israel's most ancient creeds: "God is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin."⁷ At the risk of being patronizing, I would like to repeat that passage.

Yes, repentance is difficult. God uses this mechanism with Nathan to bring David to his knees in brokenness. Just like God will do that to each one of us when we need to repent and change our mind about our beliefs about Him revealed by our rebellious behavior. Until God took David to his knees, David was unable to be lifted up from His despair. Until God devastates us with his gracious conviction, we cannot experience deliverance from our shame, our guilt, and our sin.

That does not mean that the aftermath of sin does not still remain. It does. God doesn't always mitigate or lessen the consequences of our sin, even though the sin is forgiven. This concept and truth is also illustrated by 2

⁶ Dr. Daniel L. Akin, "Applying a Text-Driven Sermon," *Text Driven Preaching*, (Nashville TN: B&H Publishing, 2010) p. 270.

⁷ Exodus 34:6-7. The texts in Scripture that are dependent on that promise: Numbers 14:18-19; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2

Samuel 12. Sin that has been forgiven and then forgotten by God can still leave some human scars.

Contextualizing the Cough

Remember that story about my grandpa's cough? I heard it, was completely busted, changed my mind and then changed my behavior. However, my friend Steve sitting next to me had no clue about the cough. He didn't know what it meant. He didn't realize it was about him. I sat in conviction and stinging from correction. Steve was still "easy breezy lemon squeezy." I had to take a few moments and contextualize the warning to repent and change for him. He caught on quickly.

But what about those of us here this morning that have not dealt with God's corrective conviction through the Holy Spirit? The Lord is revealing to you that you need to repent from some rebellion. The good news for you is that the Lord Jesus carried your sins for you when He carried his cross. He died in atonement for your sins so that when you repent and believe, the Kingdom of God can be yours. God removes your sin, carried by Jesus, away from you and places it somewhere far, far away, never to be seen of or heard from and divinely displaced and forgotten.

Repentance occurs when we think differently about God's word. That difference bears itself out in our actions. When repentance is genuine, God immediately forgives and forgets the sin. While sin may still have consequences we need to deal with, we deal with it cleansed and forgiven. Repent today. Change how you think about your sin. Mean it. And in an instant, you can be forgiven by Jesus. And God will forget your sin and you can "be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones."⁸

⁸ Psalm 32:11a

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

How did your parents get your attention when you needed correction? Craig mentioned his grandpa's cough in church. What did your elders/family members do to get your attention?

What is something over the course of your life that you have changed your mind about? As a child, you hated broccoli but now you like it. What is something that God's word has worked in your life to change about you?

Read Exodus 20:5-6. How long will God allow sin's consequences to endure? How long does God extend his love? Sin has a limited lifespan, but God's love lasts forever.

The Old Testament places forgiveness as a prominent feature. Why does God not punish David according to the Sinai covenant? Why does God choose quick to reassure that David won't die?

Two statements are run-on sentences in the Hebrew: "I have sinned against the Lord," and "The Lord has taken away your sin." Only two words create the smallest gap between them. Their very proximity communicates a characteristic of God. What does the confession and forgiveness being so close together make you think about God?

Read Psalm 32 and 51 together. What promises does God make you in those passages? Write them down or share them with your group/friends.