

Shepherd, Poet, Fugitive, King: The Life of David
Today's Message: "You Are the Man: David is Confronted for His Sin"
Jeff Kennedy April 21, 2024

Opening Scripture: 2 Samuel 12:1–7a (end the reading at the line "You are the man")

Introduction and Setting the Scene: Jesus told his disciples a parable so that in their confrontations with sin within the body of Christ, they would never forget how absolutely dependent they are on God's grace.

There was once a just and discerning king who decided to **settle his debts** with his subjects.

One man owed a **staggering debt of ten thousand talents or twenty years' wages**.

Unable to repay, the servant faced a dire decree from the king: He, his family, and all his possessions were to be sold to satisfy the debt. Overcome with despair, the servant threw himself at the mercy of the King, saying, "Give me time, and I'll repay it."

In a magnanimous gesture, the King released the man and **forgave the entire debt**.

He left the court **rejoicing** but soon encountered a fellow servant who owed him a **mere hundred denarii** (which is about a day's wages). In a fury, he grabbed his fellow debtor and demanded immediate payment!

As he had done earlier, the man replied, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back."

Instead, the servant had him thrown into prison until he could repay the debt—a sum that paled in comparison to what had been forgiven him.

Other **servants reported** the incident to the king. Infuriated by the ingratitude and hypocrisy, the king summoned the unforgiving servant.

"You wicked servant," he thundered. "I forgave your enormous debt because you begged me. **Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had on you?"** The King ordered the servant into prison where he was in torment until he paid off the last penny of that debt. And Jesus concluded, "So also my heavenly Father will do to you if you fail to forgive your brother and sister from the heart." A stern and sobering warning to be sure.

The parable draws our attention to our inherent hypocrisy. We are quick to condemn others for lesser matters than we are ourselves guilty of.

And that's exactly what David does when confronted with Nathan. He is incensed, outraged over someone else's act of injustice all while remaining blind to his own faults.

Last week, Pastor Ryan took us through chapter 11, and we were horrified to find our hero, David, spiraling out of control through sin and attempting to cover it up. Idleness becomes desire, desire fuels his sinful actions, actions lead to conspiracies, and all of it leads to this moment when David must be confronted by God for his failure.

The text today will unfold in four scenes: The confrontation, the confession, the consequences, and the conversion.

Scene 1: Nathan's Confrontation (2 Samuel 12:1–12).

The Parable: If you've ever lost someone dear to you, then you understand the emotional chord Nathan's parable strikes. David's reaction to it is understandable—He is filled with indignation over the injustice committed by the rich man who carelessly and callously took the poor man's only lamb. David plays right into Nathan's hands.

The Process: Notice Nathan's process for confronting David. There's a discernable pattern here.

- **Nathan moves quickly.** I am struck in the story by just how fast God moves to send Nathan to confront this moral failure in his life. **Jesus commanded that if we are at the altar offering our worship and praise to God and then suddenly realize that someone is holding our sin against us, we are to leave the gift or act of worship, go and be reconciled immediately, and then return and offer our worship. Likewise, Jesus instructed us that if our right hand causes us to sin, cut it off and throw it away;** if our right eye causes us to fall, we should pluck it out and throw it away also. Not literally—but the metaphor is clear—when it comes to sin, we must deal urgently and drastically with it.\

Why would that be so? Can you imagine the hardening effect if sin were allowed to go on secretly? If God allowed it to remain concealed, it would transform a once soft and pliable heart into a petrified and unmovable stone.

- **Nathan appeals to David's conscience.** The prophet could have easily cited Moses' law in Deuteronomy 5:1: "Do not covet your neighbor's wife or desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." But he doesn't begin with the statute, which risks setting up an unnecessary confrontation—possibly causing David to dig in his heels and become defensive as Saul had been many years earlier. The Parable is designed to indirectly confront wrongdoing by stimulating the conscience—to appeal directly to the heart before he has a chance to rationalize his actions intellectually.

God knows he is here dealing with a man whose conscience was once pierced for nothing but cutting off a corner of Saul's robe in a cave. God also knows how the sinful mind can produce all kinds of rationalizations for sin. There is no reason to believe this act of betrayal, as heinous as it may be, would snuff out the embers of David's moral conscience so Nathan begins there.

- **Nathan leads him to self-realization.** Without realizing it, **David implicates himself by condemning the character** of the rich man in Nathan’s drama. He’s trapped himself by his own judgment—the measure he uses is now measured to him. His outrage for this cruelty and injustice is immediately redirected at him. In response to David’s judgment on the man, Nathan famously responds, **“You are the man,”** and with that, the **“parable” becomes a mirror**—and instead of seeing some unnamed man he is able to see himself.

David’s outrage was hypocritical for sure, but at least it revealed **David had retained a sense of moral clarity**. Unlike Saul, David was still able to discern right from wrong.

In Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son, the turning point for the rebellious and lost son was a sudden moment of self-realization: “When he came to his senses” (Luke 15:17).

David will go on to record one of the most repentant and eye-opening Psalms in all of Scripture: Psalm 51. Change is only possible when we realize that we are in the wrong. The most powerful lessons we learn are through personal experience.

- **Nathan names the sin.** 2 Samuel 12:9 “Why then have you despised the Lord’s command by doing what I consider^[c] evil? You struck down Uriah the Hethite with the sword and took his wife as your own wife—you murdered him with the Ammonite’s sword.” When the prophet finally lowers the boom on David, stopping his hypocrisy mid-charade, revealing that the rich man in the parable is him, he tells him exactly what he did wrong. He calls it out and doesn’t sugarcoat it. God says, “I chose you, rescued you from all your enemies, gave Saul’s family to you, all of the houses of Israel and Judah, and if that weren’t enough, I wouldn’t give you more. But your actions with Bathsheba and Uriah show contempt for my generosity. The adultery, the conspiracies, the murder, the coverups.” Nathan doesn’t pull the punch. Likewise, Jesus instructs his followers in dealing with brothers and sisters who’ve sinned against them, “If your brother sins against you, **go tell him his fault**, between you and him alone” (Matt 18:15). We are to communicate their fault.

Illustration: Remember the story of Jesus traveling to Samaria (a forbidden territory) to speak with a woman who had been sleeping around with multiple men in the town. Jesus saves her and her village not by avoiding the hard truths but by revealing them. He confronts the woman’s sin and corrects her bad theology—and she is won by this grace to the truth.

- **Nathan discloses the consequences.** 2 Samuel 12:10–12 “Now therefore, the sword will never leave your house because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hethite to be your own wife.”¹¹ This is what the Lord says, ‘I am going to

bring disaster on you from your own family: I will take your wives and give them to another before your very eyes, and he will sleep with them in broad daylight. ¹² You acted in secret, but I will do this before all Israel and in broad daylight.”

The prophet then relays the verdict. The secret sins are exposed and brought into the light, a sword of division will not soon depart from his dynasty, and the child conceived in sin will perish.

Application: Is there someone in your world today who clearly needs to be confronted?

Should you consider moving quickly before their hearts can harden further?

Would an appeal to the heart and conscience, gently lead them to see the truth for themselves?

Can you trust God for the boldness to call out sin for what it is, not soften it, and convey the potential consequences that are unavoidable?

Scene 2: David Confesses (2 Samuel 12:13). Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

David’s Confession: This immediate confession reveals that he is still a man after God’s own heart. He doesn’t try to justify or defend his actions, he doesn’t give excuses, and he doesn’t shift the blame to others. He simply takes ownership of his wrongdoing and confesses it publicly.

Psalms 32 reveals his state of mind when he struggles with sin. Psalm 32:3–5: “When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer’s heat. ⁵Then 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.”

Have you ever had something that gnawed at you and kept you up at night? God himself had convicted David’s heart and the draining effect on him, trying to keep it hidden, all while carrying the burden on his own.

Illustration: On occasion, I have failed my kids by being too stern in my discipline or too harsh with my words. One of those times, I just frankly felt totally justified in my anger. But the more I sat and tried to ignore it, the worse it got. As David said, it became a draining life-sucking force in me, and I finally was able to confess and repent for terribly overreacting.

Some of you parents may need to repent to your children and ask their forgiveness for being too harsh, constantly negative (even when they succeed), and too self-absorbed.

Some of you children need to repent for dishonoring your mother and father showing them contempt and choosing a life of sin even though they’ve clearly raised you in the faith, yet you have allowed yourself to become deceived and seduced by this wicked, godless culture.

What is the power of confession? Why is it so transforming?

- Matthew 3:6 John in the Jordan baptized all the people who came “confessing their sins.” Confession is linked with baptism because it signals a new start. And we so desperately need renewal and change.
- James 5:16 tells us to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” Confession through prayer has a strange and mysterious healing effect on us.
- 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Confession is purifying. God is faithful and just to forgive us (change our status) and to cleanse us (transform us from nature).

There is something so healing, cleansing, and transformative about articulating our sins and verbalizing our transgressions.

David experiences restoration because of God's grace, which is now evidenced in his confession of wrongdoing. Fortunately, he is able to confess and repent while his conscience still secretly bothers him.

The exhortation for us is: sinner, don't wait. Don't think that you'll nurse this secret sin and repent of it later. Don't be fooled into believing that nonsense. There will come a point where, unlike today, you don't care anymore because your heart has turned to stone. Your conscience has been seared as with a hot iron. If you're trapped in sin, then you must take urgent and drastic measures to confess and repent before a holy God.

Scene 3: Inescapable Consequences (2 Samuel 12:14–25).

The child becomes ill, and David fasts and prays in earnest. Verses 15–17 “The Lord struck the baby that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became deathly ill. ¹⁶David pleaded with God for the boy. He fasted, went home, and spent the night lying on the ground. ¹⁷The elders of his house stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat anything with them.” After the child died on the seventh day, David’s servants hesitated to inform him, fearing his reaction. Knowing the situation from their whispers, David confirmed the death with his servants. He got up, cleansed himself, worshipped at the Lord’s house, and then ate.

Caveat: Why this detail about God striking the baby with illness and death? *First, God, as the creator and giver of life is the only one who can take life.* This is what Job recognized in his agony and loss—the Lord gives and the Lord takes away—blessed be the name of the Lord.

Second, it’s a mistake to read your personal situation into this narrative. If you’ve lost a child to accidental death, suicide, or miscarriage or a number of reasons—don’t heap guilt on yourself, thinking it was somehow God’s judgment on you.

Jesus reminded his disciples about the accident with the tower of Siloam, killing 18 people. He asks, “Or those eighteen that the tower in Siloam fell on and killed—do you think they were more sinful than all the other people who live in Jerusalem?” Jesus said, the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, hurricanes destroy Christian homes and atheist homes. Floods wash away Christian farms and Muslim villages.

Having said that, there is a clear warning in the passage for the consequences of our choices. David is judged for his sins.

- God had warned Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:16) that on the day they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die.
- God likewise warned Israel (Deut 7) that if they went into the land of Canaan and worshiped false gods, they would be destroyed as a people and cut off from the land.
- Paul taught in Romans 1 that those who sin “receive in themselves the due penalty” for those sins.
- In Galatians 6:7–8, he warns, “Don’t be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows, he will also reap, ⁸because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.”

If we could sin and ultimately escape punishment for our transgressions, then God would indeed be mocked. And Paul says, “It’s deception to think that way. God will not be mocked.”

What David experiences here is the harsh reality of the consequences that Nathan prophesied. And it's not some petty form of punishment or revenge against David and the innocent child. It's retributive justice from a God who is absolutely holy and perfectly just in all his judgments.

We also see a glimpse of hope, which leads us to our next and final scene.

Scene 4: God Restores and Redeems David (2 Samuel 12:24–31). Of course, if we miss this vital point in the story we have missed the whole thing. Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba; he went to her and slept with her. She gave birth to a son and named him Solomon. The Lord loved him,²⁵ and he sent a message through the prophet Nathan, who named him Jedidiah, because of the Lord.²⁶ Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal fortress. In the midst of this judgment, we need to see God’s mercy on display. God’s grace runs, like a golden thread, right through this account.

- We see the grace of discipline—sending Nathan to confront him while the sin was still fresh was an act of grace.
- Allowing him the opportunity to confess and repent.
- We see that the judgment is not catastrophic. Yes, there will be lasting consequences, which will no doubt be felt for generations to come. But David’s life is spared, and God restores him to his position.

God gives David and Bathsheba Solomon, on whom the LORD sets his loving-kindness. The loss of one child is answered by a precious gift from God, who grows up to be David’s very shadow. Eventually, God anointed Solomon as King, and he greatly expanded the realm and built the temple, but Solomon also sinned and needed to be disciplined.

God allows David to be restored to his former success militarily. 2 Samuel 12:29–31. “So David assembled all the troops and went to Rabbah; he fought against it and captured it.³⁰ He took the crown from the head of their king, and it was placed on David’s head. The crown weighed seventy-five pounds of gold, and it had a precious stone in it. In addition, David took away a large quantity of plunder from the city.³¹ He removed the people who were in the city and put them to work with saws, iron picks, and iron axes, and to labor at brickmaking. He did the same to all the Ammonite cities. Then he and all his troops returned to Jerusalem.”

Notice where this whole narrative began—David taking the spring-summer season off and being found idle, with nothing to do while his troops went out to war. The author made a point of telling us, “This is the season when Kings go out to fight.” And David, the King, stays at home.

Now, it says, v. 29 “So David assembled all the troops and went to Rabbah; he fought and captured it.” Verse 31 “then he and all his troops returned to Jerusalem.” The author is clearly trying to tell us that the whole debacle was due to David not going out with his troops as he should and staying at home. Idleness becomes the devil’s playground and now the situation has been reversed. The warrior-king is restored, and in the end, he is found returning with all his troops from the battlefield.

This is a picture in the text of restoration and redemption.

Make no mistake—God’s correction is redemptive, God’s discipline is formational, God’s rebuke is our salvation, and God’s temporal judgments (here and now) save us from eternal damnation.

God could have ignored this sin, and David would’ve followed in Saul’s footsteps, becoming a hardened, idolatrous, sinful king. This is what the author of Hebrews says,

Hebrews 12:7–11 “God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn’t we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

God’s correction is redemptive. God’s discipline is a grace to us. His goal is to restore and renew us, and this is why David later prays, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” God’s goal is to restore us to a place of joy in our salvation, to renew his Spirit within us, and to welcome us again into the warm embrace of Christian fellowship.

Conclusion:

The heart of today’s message compels us to confront and confess our sins with the same honesty and urgency exhibited by Nathan and David. Like David, each of us is susceptible to the seduction of sin, and like him, we are not beyond the reach of God’s transformative grace.

Let’s pray:

1. Is there someone in your life today who might need a “Nathan” to swiftly appeal to their conscience, to gently lead them to the inescapable realization of their failure in the hopes of restoring them?
2. Perhaps you are David in this story today. You’ve tried to keep your sin a secret so that no one would know what you’ve done, but the fact is that your transgression has been sapping the very life and spiritual vitality out of your bones, friend. And in this moment, you realize that your silence is just a choice to continue the misery of carrying a burden that Christ already carried for you, nailing it to the cross.

3. Perhaps you're here this morning and are struck with a sobering reminder that your choices have real and lasting consequences. Come what may, you will confess and be forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteousness. Come what may, you will live from this moment on, surrendering all that you are to a holy God who loves you and wants to redeem you. God's discipline, while painful at times, is always aimed at our restoration and spiritual growth.