

David at His Worst

The Life of David

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Bible Text: 2 Samuel 11:1-27; 2 Samuel 12:1-25

Preached on: Sunday, June 6, 2021

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Well, last week in our evening sermon series in the life of David, the title was "David at His Best," and we were very happy, weren't we, there to look at his care of Mephibosheth, that helpless man laying making no real contribution to David's kingdom, if you like, nothing that could be expected from him, and yet here David was acting in the room of our Lord Jesus Christ. He showed great favor, great mercy to this helpless man and brought him from the ash heap to sit among princes. Also, we saw this a few weeks back, great victories, military conquests, successes. David is at the zenith of his power. Well, if David at his best was the sermon title last week, I gave us there an advance warning that the next title was going to be "David at His Worst." That, I'm afraid, is where we reach as we are actually in chapter 11 and also moving into chapter 12, time perhaps didn't permit to read all of this but I think it's familiar territory to many of us there, the years that we've had familiarity with Scripture and including this episode in David's life.

I'm not actually going to spend weeks upon weeks, as it were, dwelling upon this and kind of looking in the minutiae of everything that happened, what went wrong, because it is, isn't it, in the whole flow of the narrative are things that's been remarkable. We've seen David scoring remarkable triumphs, showing such character, and even in his weaknesses there's still something that burst through and we find the Lord working strongly in him. But after this, after this chapter, chapter 11, things are never the same again and now we follow with some agony and distress just how things work out from here with David's kingdom, and we know what follows from here and all the detail of that and we'll touch on it tonight but look at it more thoroughly in a couple of weeks time.

But it is now almost a sense of downhill and climax after all of the great happenings and the covenant that David has, God's established with him. Now we find this happening and it's there and that is Scripture does not give you a wrong impression, doesn't allow us to have heroes who have no blemishes and no faults or where those blemishes and faults are sort of hidden away and kind of airbrushed out and as if a bit of photoshopping takes place here with the Scripture and we just see sort of a glowing kind of report of the successes and spiritual caliber of the people. No, we see their failures. You can read through Genesis and you see the failures of the patriarchs and here we see the most spectacular failures of David and we find ourselves almost saying with incredulity,

"What, the man after God's own heart and we read this? The man after God's own heart?" And we're just captivated by the narrative, aren't we, and what he did and how he acted and all the mistakes one after the other that he made and we're shocked at every turn, little details spring out from the page to us that we hadn't noticed before. We think, "Why, think of the hypocrisy that could do this or say this to these people. How did he carry this off like this?" And yet he did and we find ourselves then having, because Scripture compels us, doesn't it, we can't just sort of hope that those pages kind of fall out and as preachers we can just sort of gloss over that or forget that and move on to happier things. It's there and it's there to be preached and, like I say, we're not going to spend weeks or months kind of pouring over this, nevertheless we cannot but stop and ponder, be amazed and draw whatever lessons we need to draw from it. We've seen David at his best, that had lessons to us on acts of mercy, points us forward to our Lord Jesus Christ, but here David, in a way, no way is acting anywhere near being a type of Christ. We see him here very much at his worst.

The first heading very briefly really: David's great wickedness. And I hardly need to say anything really do I, after having read that passage of Scripture. What did he do? Which commandments didn't he break? Every commandment you can actually think of he was breaking in what he was doing here spectacularly, very obviously. Adultery, the seventh commandment, hugely broken that. Why, you think David, how this woman and there is sin and it's conceiving in the heart, and there being enticed and sent and inquired about the woman, and really there is someone here who said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife?" Yes, that's the word, isn't it, "the wife of Uriah the Hittite." It's even as if the messenger perhaps spotting what was going on here tried to put some roadblocks between David and an act that maybe they sensed was a developing danger.

"It's the wife of Uriah the Hittite." There's warning enough there. It's a man's wife, and a good man at that. And he's out there fighting battles which David should have been fighting but he wasn't. Adultery, the most wretched kind follows. And you can say, "Well, what also followed from that?" And we know because we read because the detail is there in a horrible minute detail, the agony of his deception, the things that he can casually say. There is a good man, Uriah, whom he has had put to death. It's murder, the sixth commandment.

Then here is David and the messenger who Joab has told, you've got some strange tidings to bring here that look as if I've been absolutely reckless as a commander sending those men so close to the wall that the archers killed them. And if David begins to get cross and angry and start to say, "What was Joab doing?" You quickly tell him, "And Uriah the Hittite is dead." The messenger must have thought, "Well, I don't know why that news would make David happy but I'll tell him that." And it's what he does faithfully relay, and there is David in verse 25, "Do not let this thing displease you," tell Joab, "for the sword devours one as well as another. That's life," he's saying. "That's life. The sword, well, you could be at the wrong place at the wrong time and you end up dead and there we are, that's the battle for you." Knowing that actually, no, this was actually he who had planned that the sword would devour this good man. Lying, false witness, absolute hypocrisy here as he tells this and doubtless has the countenance to carry it off. It might have surprised

the messenger, "He's not angry. That's curious. He's quite sort of non-committal and quite laid back about it. Well, that will be good for Joab to hear that." And so he's able to tell Joab just how David reacted which wouldn't surprise Joab at all as he's in on this horrible conspiracy.

So there's lying, there is murder, there is adultery, stealing. That's when Nathan, we haven't been able to read that because, of course, it follows on from it where we have that great warning at the end of chapter 11 that the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, though it was several several months, why, perhaps a year approaching before Nathan then comes on his errand and tells that remarkable parable and draws David into it and he's talking about the rich man who has a whole herd, a whole flock of animals and when a visitor comes could have chosen any one of those to make then a sacrifice and a meal for this traveler but instead steals the only ewe lamb that was so precious to his poor neighbor. That's what he does, "Oh, I'll take that, steal that from him." And David, of course, gets very incensed at that and pronounces a great verdict on that man, "He shall die!" He's going to restore to this poor neighbor for what this awful act he has done.

Stealing is in it, he's stolen a man's wife away from him. Covetousness has to be there, doesn't it? He's coveting, coveting his neighbor's wife. That is it, mainstream, absolute, there is the plain letter of the 10th commandment. And in it all, well, the first table of the law and the first commandment for that's the one, isn't it, from all the rest follow, that he's got another god here, his lust, his desires. He's put them over and above the honoring of God. God has ceased in his eyes here to be God, not operating as God in his life. And all these commandments and more than those commandments, all of them are being broken here by David.

Then within the Levitical sacrificial system, there is somebody who has no sacrifice that you can bring to this. There is simply none, that it would be the death penalty. And we read in chapter 12, this is where Nathan has to hurry to assure David, "You shall not die," because in all that David has done, that here was really him speaking his own death penalty and Nathan has to assure him that God has put away his sin, "You shall not die."

What a thing, incredible child of God, yes, the man after God's own heart but what a great great wickedness. Well, yes, we can say in those days when polygamy, and we'll speak a bit more about that the next time, but that that God winked at in those times of ignorance, that God permitted people, men to have, brought only trouble, ruin to them but God allowed them for that, that excess of their own desires for them to express it and do it in that fashion, the Lord's own wise purposes yet not now. That's clear, not now, not in new covenant times. That whole practice has to go. There's a disqualification from pastoral office or however one thinks of that, or from being a deacon, for instance. No, that is a disqualifier but beyond it, of course, we have never never underestimate this, we have a greater measure of the Holy Spirit's power, that going with the ultimate sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, consistent with that is greater light, there's greater example, there's greater revelation of holiness to us. We have a greater measure of the Holy Spirit given to us. At Pentecost, they've had some unique features and all that happened then on that day but not unique in this, that for every believer, new covenant believer, that same

outpouring, that same immersion, that same saturation of the Holy Spirit is true and with that comes capacity to say no more firmly and more strongly against sin.

Well, there is David perhaps without some of the advantages that we have if we're trying to find something kind to say about him here, aren't we, but beyond that perhaps there's not much more we can say but move to our second heading: dangers of idleness. Dangers of idleness. It's notable, isn't it, that David is where he is in Jerusalem with time and leisure to walk on the roof of his house, that he's reclining there when others are out in the field fighting battles, serious battles. Enjoying some success near to the capital of the Ammonite kingdom, the other side of the Jordan River, and when Uriah is summoned home in order to try to kind of, sort of construct a scenario where he sleeps with his wife and then we can plausibly say that the child that Bathsheba's expecting must therefore be Uriah's. But Uriah doesn't fall in with that at all. Uriah's heart is with the men out in the field which is where David's heart should have been.

So David there reaching and drinking and shamefully making this good man drunk. David should have been out and so indeed Uriah feels, "I should be out. What am I doing here in Jerusalem? If I'm here in Jerusalem for whatever reason, to bring a message anybody else could have done, it's certainly not the time to be thinking of being there with my wife, showing her tender affections when all my friends, commander of the army, is out in the field." David, you might have thought, felt a little bit shamed as Uriah was saying those things but something had gone wrong, hadn't it, and it had already gone wrong. It didn't just happen on that particular day that there was a sudden collapse that was totally out of the blue.

The fact that David was not there at the time when kings go out to battle tells us something already was going wrong. Idleness had embedded itself and ease, he was at ease in Zion and had dropped into little by little perhaps, stage by stage, a careless state of mind, an unspiritual state of mind. But it had been building up and it had been building up. Curiously, success can be a cause of that. All of the great things that David had accomplished, mercies that he'd shown, the promise that he and his family had been given, well, that was meant to instill obedience. If you remember in that covenant the Lord warned that if any disobey, then they will receive punishments, that this covenant doesn't mean that David and his family now have sort of carte blanche, a diplomatic immunity that whatever they get up to, no problem, we've got this covenant, God's going to use our family on into the future. It didn't say that. It said that he would punish those that disobeyed him.

Yet perhaps somewhere in this David felt invincible now, that he felt with this success and this blessing, "I can do no wrong." And even that mindset of, "I'm too important for me to fail, indeed I'm too important and too big to worry about such things as the commandments. I've just got a bit bigger than those things." He wouldn't have said it in that way to himself but that was the attitude that had sort of grown up in his heart and now it led him to idleness, that he wasn't as zealous for the things he should have been as the king and should have been at the head of the army. No, he's back there at home. His mind is elsewhere, it's drifted, it's not on spiritual things. He's careless. He's weak.

All of this perhaps has been building up a long time. "I can relax now. The big battles are fought now." And that was fatal, and so when the moment came there wasn't enough happening in David's soul to fight back, if he was on the roof and happened to notice this woman, well, then his eyes should have immediately done 180 degree turn and that he would be then kind of, as it were, accidentally though he may have happened upon her and being kind to David there, he might have been looking for this, but accidentally, shall we say that that happened, then he should then have done a clean memory wipe and wanted that vision totally out of his mind. But of course, he didn't.

Maybe he was looking for that and having looked for it, he now was making inquiries, wasn't he? David sent and inquired in verse 3 and even though, as I've said, there was a little bit of a red flag put up, "The wife of Uriah the Hittite," but then David sent messengers and took her. And she came so she's complicit in this and whatever she felt for her husband and she mourned for him and we might think that she was mighty mighty conflicted and mighty mighty guilty knowing that she is part actually of the story of her husband's own death. But anyway that wasn't in her mind there and then. She couldn't see far enough ahead anymore than David could see far enough ahead. He's not thinking. He's not putting the commandments in place. He's not thinking, "Well, if I break that, the implications and consequences, that will be huge. Stop there." He doesn't.

Well, for us we may not be kings and we may not have battles that we should be out fighting but here we are at this time of the year, what am I doing here? Why aren't I, I don't know, clad in armor or something and leading us all off there to slay some Ammonites in Rabah or whatever else, but nevertheless there are lessons. And for us in the West, just the danger of a little modest wealth to make us careless. It can make us careless, that we can feel impregnable, that we retire from occupations and almost retire from being a Christian, and can give ourselves there a kind of off-duty feel, get a little loose, get a little careless, not holding ourselves to account as once perhaps we did. And it can be very subtle and even, as I say, a little modest wealth can do that.

The pursuit of leisure, well, that's our society, is it not? That is what they're waiting for and leisure, there, I put it in commas, lamenting, don't we, the way that the new freedoms that may or may not be coming, to hear the things which are moving off into July, but anyway wherever and whenever they come, that it is leisure that people want to go. Holidays here or spend their money on things there, well, I'm sure eating somewhere, that's no bad thing but then when there's drunkenness that follows, immorality that's part of it. You've got the nightclubs all moaning and groaning because June 21st may not happen. Well, we think what happens in nightclubs and you have to say, "Well, sadly so many people are employed in these industries but rather they weren't and now they're employed in something else." We'd rather that people do not think leisure, money we have, therefore we pursue our heart's desire because those heart's desires of people are sinful and not going to come out looking good.

Pursuit of leisure can weaken spiritual ambition in the believer so that life becomes more about us, not about him. Dangers, there are dangers not quite so fatal, not quite so capital

the offenses as they are here in David's case, but we have to be on our guard. He wasn't vigilant, was he, here. He got careless. His mind wasn't stayed on the things of God and we can not necessarily because of wealth or whatever opportunities, time on our hands that we might have, but it's the effect of disappointment can erode, can have a secret gnawing influence eroding something within, or the behavior of other people, their failures, failures in the local church, failures in the wider church, and it can erode, it can make us cynical, "Well, others aren't doing it so why should I?" Or, "Their behavior there, well, I don't think I'll bother then in that case if that's tolerated. I'll do what I like then." And it can have a weakening effect, failures, moral failures of other people, just lack of concern that other people have for the things of God that can have a backwash onto us and something in us just goes off the boil. It may not be that we commit such dreadful sin as David but there is something going wrong within the soul and that then will show perhaps a lack of willingness, unbelief, cynicism, a bit pride maybe that asserts itself. We need to be vigilant.

Questions David wasn't asking himself, we must not make the mistake of not asking them of ourselves. How goes it with my soul? How am I in my walk with God? How am I in my spiritual life? Have I dropped, have I lost something? Or is there a fervency there, can I see God at work in my soul? Completed products are we, any of us, we're all a work in progress but are we looking for that work? Are we inquiring carefully of ourselves? Am I moving forward in holiness? Am I getting a handle on my besetting sins that are here? Enough warnings in Scripture to make us really stay very much on our toes. Ephesians 6:18, Paul completes his consideration of the armor of God and he says, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." Being watchful to this end. Well, David hasn't been watchful and his eye unfortunately is not on his own soul and how it goes there, his eye is roving around and looking out for an attractive woman and that was the state that he got into.

We could quote 1 Peter 5, a familiar verse this, verse 8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The devil has got a very prized piece of game there, didn't he? The lion found David and as David's walking about unfortunately the devil is walking about with him and David fell most dreadfully. He wasn't being sober. He wasn't being vigilant. He had lost sight of what he was called to be, where he was called to be. Or in 1 Corinthians 10:12 again these warnings, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Those promises, that's where presumption comes in, that's where we can become subtly Antinomian and that can be a besetting sin in Calvinism, that because we actually have wonderful promises, election, predestination, we are promised the final perseverance of the saints, we cannot fail, but the truth is we cannot and yet that can play out badly in some people who take that then as a license to do just what you like. Antinomianism can spring sadly from that soil because all truth can be turned around to become untruth. Good truth can then become heresy and we are told there, aren't we, when we think and we're right to think that we stand, we're not sort of lacking in conviction or assurance in that way, I trust we're not, but that must not then become a poison to us through wrong

application, that we then become careless, feel like we can't fail or feel that we're above the law and we can just live as we choose. That's the high road to a fall. Perhaps David was there in his thinking.

Well, I mentioned polygamy, more than one wife, that is where David had a very great weakness and common with quite a few in the Old Testament, and that was part of the story of him, that that had given too much access to that thought life and that appetite. It fed it and stoked it and so that was all part of the issue there. So the dangers of idleness, in a way the idleness is a sign, is a symptom of all these other things happening, and although, as I say, we may not have quite what King David had by way of responsibility, nevertheless the same things that brought David down can be working to bring any one of us down in one way or the other.

Well, my next heading: the need of rapid confession. The need of rapid confession and here I'm assuming what we haven't actually read which is the next chapter and where Nathan comes and tells this remarkable parable, heaven-sent wisdom that draws David in and David condemns himself, that he calls for judgment upon the person in the story that Nathan the prophet had told and the result is the king is self-condemned and the prophet tells him, "You are the man. You have just condemned yourself. You are the man that is guilty in the story and you correctly pronounced your own guilt." So David at that point immediately confesses his sin. He hasn't done up until then but he does at that point.

As I say, this could be, well, the child has been born, this is several months after the event, this is nine months plus so we think we're probably talking about a year. A year David has kept the lid on this, to use it in those terms, because there was something to keep the lid on. Though David is sort of carrying it off pretty well in public, though he is sort of still the king, still occupying the place he does in religious life of the nation as well as its military leader, inside it is absolute turmoil. Inside it is absolute turmoil and so David may carry out his public duties with a measure of efficiency and good humor, effectiveness, but then when he closes the door, maybe he's in his own private chamber there at night, there is then only inner turmoil and his conscience is accusing him morning, noon and night.

We're very good and this is very sad, doesn't speak well of us, it's not good in that sense but we are very good at suppressing the conscience and being able to function even though our conscience somewhere is trying trying to get our attention. It does, somewhere in the depth of our being, it's got our attention and that's why we're so unhappy and disturbed in our private moments. So there is David exercising his public duties but then his mind will drift back to 2 Samuel 11, all the things that he did and he'd be reliving it, feeling awful about it. But anyway, somehow he's got his conscience wrestled into such submission and though it's like just a recorder and holy war will cry out every so often to make David's life, private life, an absolute misery, he is holding that in and it isn't doing him any good, not in the slightest.

And we are brought into some insight, we would think, of this period of his life before Nathan has come and the dam has burst and there is David now exposed, and since

obviously the events of 2 Samuel 11, and it would make sense of what we read, for instance, Psalm 32:3-4, David said, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer." He actually then goes on next, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.'" But see he was like before he got to that point. Nathan has come as the messenger of God, the prophet of God, then kind of cuts through all this hypocrisy, all this suppression of the conscience and now the conscience can actually have its moment and reprove David and expose him.

But there it is, his bones grew old when he was silent, when he hadn't confessed his sin, groaning all the day long, "day and night Your hand was heavy upon me." He might have been doing his duties but there was a heaviness somewhere in his soul. His old enjoyment of these things perhaps, the pleasure that he had in these things has fled from him and his vitality is kind of the nature ease with which, the instinctiveness with which he would bring God's counsel to bear, he would do the right thing, say the right thing and really mean it, that vitality was gone. The drought of summer.

Or Psalm 38:1-8, "O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows pierce me deeply, And Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh Because of Your anger, Nor any health in my bones Because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering Because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, And there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart." That's not pleasant, is it? That's not a good place to be and that's where sin unconfessed leave us. That's where David before he acknowledged his transgressions, that is where he was, in poor health, felt physically ill, he felt unhappy. That's what a guilty conscience can do, it wrecks our physical health and brings us such commotion within.

Well, then comes the moment that cannot be left off any longer, the need, isn't it, for rapid confession. That's the result, that is the turmoil that we bring upon ourselves and, for sure, David must have wondered, "If I did confess, what would happen? What about my place as king and my office? What about the promises of God? Do I really have to keep up this front in order to preserve my throne in order for those promises to come true?" Well, you can sort of feel some of the calculations that he's making, all the time he's allowing gossip to pass around the palace to be sure, that if David thought he'd got away with it, he hadn't. Too many people knew too many things. Joab knew things, would he stay silent? Perhaps he'd passed on the news of what was going on. Had to be even puzzled about David's behavior with Uriah, why did he call for him? And seeing David's behavior and his reaction when he heard that the man had been lost in battle, it sounded like Joab had been careless but David sort of brushed it off. And all these discrepant reactions and bits of behavior, may have been aware of, "Well, how did Bathsheba arrive as being now the new wife? And the child?" And people are good at doing calculations and these are not great math geniuses that need to be brought into

calculate your nine months. "Well, hang on, Uriah only came back for a couple of days and didn't even go and sleep with his wife. Where did Bathsheba's child come from?' And the rumors and the gossip are actually undermining, destroying David's throne from under him, destroying his credibility, making now his religious exercises look hypocritical, and all of that because there had not been rapid confession.

But finally more happily David at his worst and all of these things here which take note, confess sin rapidly otherwise it will be the worst when it is revealed and we will have on occasion much grief and inner turmoil because our conscience and God speaking to us through our conscience. But we have to say a man after God's own heart. His response to Nathan's confrontation to his bringing to him the news, "You are the man. You are that guilty party. You have stolen another man's wife. You have killed in order to obtain what you wanted." Now David, his response is far more encouraging and we didn't read it but 2 Samuel 12 in the light of what Nathan has said, verse 13, "So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.'" Please don't read that as just a kind of, "I've sinned against the Lord," just these few words, well, he didn't really feel much there, did he? Those words are full of meaning, full of depth and Scripture doesn't say to us that he's in tears as he says it but we might well imagine that he is, that his voice is all trembling, that he is feeling the weight of sin and the cover-up we've been describing and all of the foolishness of his hiding it or trying to hide it from himself, from God, from the people. And now the dam bursts, even would say he's relieved, there's relief that it's now known. God has spoken and he's heard the promise that his sin has been put away on this but there is nevertheless a relief that now at last he can bring it out into the open, can acknowledge it, he can confess it, and confess it most of all, to the one person above all that he knows he has offended.

"That I have sinned against the LORD. I saw these people, they're people, adulterous, things I've done, I've sinned against them, I sure have, but all of this is summed up in this, I sinned against the LORD and it is He whom I cast to one side, who I, great king that I was, lost sight of Him and became too full of myself and brought great great harm." Now here is his repentance and these words here show actually the depth of that repentance. There is great feeling, all of that that he spoke of in Psalm 32, Psalm 38, we've reached the end, at last I can shift the burden of my guilt and I can come to my God, I can come to him now with a clearer conscience and my worship and my devotions, that though this is every there, it's ever on my record, and yet I know that the Lord is gracious and merciful.

We read 2 Corinthians 7 and just looked at verses 9 to 11, I won't read them now, time is rushing on, but there is in the response of the Corinthians, Paul was heartened because there was repentance. They were now having been pricked in conscience by Paul's letters, there was a wonderful response. Paul had been agonizing that their response had been anything but promising but now it was, the relief that he feels, the joy, indignation at your sin, "What have we done?" You're wanting to clear yourself, "We'll put this behind us. All of the things we tolerated we tolerate no more." Vehemence and what vindication shows that you really are, Paul would say, "I make my boast in you and rightly you are true children of God."

And so too is David and, again, were time probably to permit, we would allow ourselves a more considered look at Psalm 51 which is the Psalm that comes out of this after this exposure. There is David, "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge," he says in verse 3, "my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight--That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge." Your law is good, it is holy and true. You are vindicated in this whereas for me, my sin is always before me. He should have been the blameless judge as the king but he acknowledges that that is belonging to God.

So what a more promising sight that we have here, what humility now, what bowing down, what acknowledgment, what willingness to find strongly against himself and to give full expression to what was really wanting to be expressed in this true child of God's heart who kept the lid on it all of that whole year and more, but it was just like a dam building up, ready to burst. And the words that came out, not words of recrimination. King Ahab, well, he sent Micaiah the prophet to prison because he didn't like the words that the prophet brought, the man of God, didn't listen to the prophet. David had he not been a child of God would have had Nathan probably put to death for this. But no, he hears what the prophet brings and acknowledges that that is the word of God to me.

So he longs now for improvements. He resolves never again. He carries that confession for that sin is always before him. It can't go away, you can't rewrite the history. Sin we will see in a couple of week's time has consequences and Nathan has told David there are consequences, the sin is forgiven but there are consequences for you and your family. But David at his worst in this now we see from Psalm 51 once more the true child of God, something of David at his best, most spiritual, searching his heart, confessing his sin, great king that he was, not thinking that anymore, he's down in the dust and giving words here for all of us at times to say when we too have sinned against God, when we are feeling wretched in conscience, then we can fit ourselves into Psalm 51. I suspect none of us have conspired to have somebody murdered and stolen somebody's wife, have acted in the ways that David did there, well, he found pardon, he found forgiveness and that means there's hope for every one of us in the things that we do and we can then show ourselves true children of God by our repentance.

So David at his worst but actually by the end of it all we're seeing the true man of God here, had to be extracted, it took a long time and we marvel at that, but then when the dam bursts and he comes through with these words, we're reassured about him, we're happy again about his spiritual standing, we're happy too to think that God's forgiveness if it can find him, dear friends, be encouraged it can find us too. His lovingkindness, the multitude of his tender mercies, well, they can blot out our transgressions also. But rapid confession always the best advice and best heeded.

DAVID AT HIS WORST

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 2 Samuel 11-12.

Previously we have seen David at his best, acting with great kindness and mercy towards Mephibosheth, a man who had nothing to give to David in return. We saw in this act of mercy something greater and recognised that David was acting here as a type of Christ, who in a more significant and far-reaching way, acted with mercy and generosity towards sinners who had nothing they could truly repay Him with. Moreover, as we come to the event we are looking at today, David had accomplished much, having defeated many of his enemies, and had also heard from the Lord of the covenant that had been established with his family.

But if we have seen David at his best, here we definitely see David at his worst.

1. David's great wickedness.

In 2 Samuel 11 we see so many of the commandments of God broken by David. There is the committing of adultery. That in itself involves coveting his neighbour's wife. There is murder, as David conspires to have Uriah killed as a way of concealing his adultery. There is false witness as David lies to Uriah and tries to deceive him into sleeping with his wife so that the baby Bathsheba is expecting could plausibly be ascribed to Uriah, not to David. Nathan's parable, that leads to David incriminating himself, majors on the act of stealing. David has stolen Uriah's wife from him. Beyond that there is the breaking of the First Commandment. God is nowhere in David's thoughts at this time. David is following his own will and is serving his lusts and desires, not the will of God.

For his wickedness there was no sacrifice in the law that could be made. The penalty for these transgressions was death. Nathan is sent by God to assure David that he will not die (2 Samuel 12:13).

2. The dangers of idleness.

In understanding how David might have declined to this dreadfully low spiritual state, we can see that there were factors which had long been working that meant that he was critically weak by the time we come to this incident in his life. We can see the dangers of idleness. David should have been out fighting battles but, instead, he is found taking his ease in Jerusalem. He had fallen into a spiritual state of mind where he was careless and not thinking of the Lord.

Part of his idleness, and the state of mind that accompanied it, stemmed from his successes. God had made a covenant with him and his family. He had won lots of victories so that he perhaps felt that he could not fail. He was too important and too big to fail. He was also too big to have to be conscientious about the law of God and felt that it was almost mission accomplished and he could now relax. It was as if he was saying in his heart, 'I can do no wrong.'

We have to be careful with what even modest wealth can do to us in bringing us into a complacent way of thinking where we cease to be vigilant and allow too much scope for leisure and an un-alert mind. It is easy in the West, with our comparative comfort and ease, to become self-centred and to forget the Lord and His commandments.

Sometimes this weakening process can happen gradually because of disappointments or through the failures of others. It is easy to become cynical when we see others doing little for the Lord, or actually failing morally, and it makes us begin to decline spiritually.

There is always a need for vigilance and self-watch to make sure we are not falling into this state of mind. Plenty of Scriptures talk about the need of taking care about how it is with our soul (See 1 Peter 5:8; 1 Corinthians 10:12; and Ephesians 6:18). We need to be constantly asking ourselves whether it is well with our souls.

3. The need for rapid confession.

One very shocking take-away from this incident in David's life is that it took a year before David repented. He therefore spent all that time, doing his public duties, and following some degree of spiritual devotion, while these huge sins were weighing upon his conscience. He managed to function in this state for a year before the Lord sent Nathan to him with the inspired parable which drew David into pronouncing judgment against himself.

We wonder how David was able to live with himself during this period. His inner life during this time was marked by turmoil and grief. Somewhere inside he was longing to confess his sin to the Lord. In the Psalms we get a sense of this inner agony and moral confusion in Psalm 32:3-4 and Psalm 38:1-8. David was falling apart inside, and his guilt was eating away at him, making him physically unwell. That is what happens when we have a guilty conscience. That is why rapid confession is always to be recommended. Our conscience will give us no peace until we confess our sin. In fact, the conscience itself is part of God's voice to us, reproving us of our sin.

David perhaps kept stalling making a confession because he was frightened of losing office or indeed of being put to death. But the longer he left it, the more his hypocrisy grew. It was likely that there was gossip in the palace and speculation about the child that was born to David and Bathsheba, many perhaps having worked it out that Uriah

could not possibly have been the father. Joab was 'in the know' and might have let others in to the secret. It gave these people the opportunity to mock God when they saw the hypocrisy of David, going about his spiritual duties, while being guilty of dreadful crimes. All of this only served to erode trust in David and his fitness to be king. We are therefore well advised to confess our sins to God. We will not be able to avoid consequences and those consequences only get larger and worse the long we stall and fail to repent.

4. A true of child of God.

We marvel, as we see David's behaviour laid bare by Scripture in minute detail, that he could truly be a child of God. How could a true believer do these things? How could a real believer commit these acts and then play the hypocrite? We recognize that the sin of polygamy was something that was a particular besetting sin among many of the saints of the Old Testament. We also recognize that new covenant believers have more power of the Holy Spirit than was given to believers in the old covenant. Those things said, we are still left reeling by David's behaviour and wonder how he can be truly a man after God's own heart when he acts like this.

What encourages us is the way David responds when Nathan reproves him for his sin. It is like a dam bursting, and we can almost imagine that David was relieved to have to end the pretence and make confession to the Lord. This confession is in 2 Samuel 12:13. The words, as reported in Scripture, are few but they are deeply felt and very meaningful. A readiness to repent of sin is a very hopeful sign that a person is a true child of God. Holding on to sin is not a good sign. Paul is encouraged when he learns of the repentance of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). They are eager to do the right thing, to put distance between themselves and their sin. All these are good signs that these people are really believers.

David is similarly eager to do the right thing and to humble himself and honour God. Psalm 51 is the outcome of that repentance. These are the words of a true child of God. Though he might have fallen badly, he has repented from the heart. We can see this spiritual and hopeful frame of mind expressed, for example, in Psalm 51:3-4 and 7-11. He longs to move on from his guilty past, to live for God's glory.

We must always confess our sins, finding hope in Psalm 51 and the forgiveness that the Lord gave to David, even though he was guilty of huge sins. It is an encouragement to us that the Lord is ever ready to show mercy to us. We should not delay by holding on to our past sins, but should go to Him quickly for cleansing and help.