

Nathan Condemns David

Printed Text • 2 Samuel 12:1–9, 13–15

Devotional Reading • John 7:40–47

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE how sins' consequences extend beyond the individual and bring hurt to God and others; ADDRESS sin and the injustices that occur as a result; and ADMIT our sins, ask God's forgiveness, and make godly choices.

In Focus

Carlton was a proud eight-and-a-half year old. He was his mother's pride and joy. He was a capable student with good grades, good behavior, and he often was known as the center of activity at his school. Though he was surrounded by friends at school, he was the youngest child in the family, and his older siblings had moved out on their own. Yes, Carlton was clearly a special kid, but he was still a kid.

One evening while goofing around in his mother's living room—an area that had always been off-limits to kids—he realized his jumping and bouncing had gone too far when he heard a crash. After searching for something large to be broken, he realized he had actually caused a tiny, delicate glass vase to topple over. It was one of his mom's newest decorations, and she had chosen it because it was so uniquely designed. As it happened, Carlton was able to put the pieces together and prop them up against a lamp so that it appeared to still be in one piece. Oddly, Mom never heard the crash and never came running.

After going to bed, Carlton soon forgot about his little incident. Months later, Carlton was in his room doing homework. He'd had a good day at school and even made an A on a test. Suddenly his great day was ruined when he heard his mother yell in that unmistakable tone of voice:

"CARLTON!" Right then, he remembered the vase, put down his pen, took a deep breath, and went to answer his mom's call. It was now time to face the truth.

We try to teach the younger generation that sometimes even though people are allowed grace, they still have to face the consequences. Where have you seen this in your life?

Keep In Mind

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man." (2 Samuel 12:7, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Anger (2 Samuel 12:5) 'aph (Heb) — Wrath; flared nostrils

B. Sinned (v. 13) khata (Heb.) — To miss the mark; to incur guilt

Say It Correctly

Uriah. yur-EYE-uh

Bathsheba. Bath-SHEE-buh

KJV

2 Samuel 12:1 And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

2 The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

3 But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

7 And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

15 And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

NLT

2 Samuel 12:1 So the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: "There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor.

2 The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle.

3 The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter.

4 One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest."

5 David was furious. "As surely as the Lord lives," he vowed, "any man who would do such a thing deserves to die!

6 He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity."

7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man! The Lord, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul.

8 I gave you your master's house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more.

9 Why, then, have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife.

13 Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan replied, "Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin.

14 Nevertheless, because you have shown utter contempt for the word of the Lord by doing this, your child will die."

15 After Nathan returned to his home, the Lord sent a deadly illness to the child of David and Uriah's wife.

The People, Places, and Times

David. David is one of the Bible's great heroes, in part because his story covers such a wide range of human experience. Born the youngest of eight sons, David had few, if any, expectations on his life, beyond shepherding and following the orders of others. David would rise quickly from the moment of his anointing, through great victories in battle, and ultimately succeed Saul as king. Like many who rise to power, David was not exempt from temptation, nor was he innocent of yielding, particularly as his life changed upon encountering Bathsheba. Just like the rest of us, David was not exempt from the consequences of his actions, nor was he able to sin outside of God's omniscient view.

Nathan. Nathan was a faithful prophet and a trusted advisor. Unlike others who hover close to the seat of power, he maintained his faithfulness to God first, and the king next. While many people fear losing their place if they do not enable a misguided leader, Nathan shows that it is more important to trust and obey God. Nathan utilized his creativity to instruct and correct David, retaining respect as a man of God. Nathan was aware of many of David's sins, but he intervened before David made the mistake of thinking he was invincible. Many of us need genuine friends who will tell us the truth, versus what we want to hear.

What friend or mentor do you have in your life who will hold you accountable?

Background

The imagery of the innocent lamb should resonate with Christians. David is now king, but many years ago, he had been a shepherd. No doubt, Nathan was able to relate to David at this core place in his personal history. While most are quite separate from our agricultural origins today, we do not have to look far to see how God has brought us from humility to glory, all because of His grace and mercy.

Nathan's story of the beloved sheep may be expanded to represent God's love for His people. The enemy is certainly seeking to devour and destroy us, while God loves us to the point He holds us close to His bosom. While Nathan's story holds a tragic end for the lamb, our truth is that God promises nothing and no one can pluck us from God's hand. Although David was guilty of taking Bathsheba wrongly, God's grace and mercy spared David's life and allowed him to continue to fulfill the call upon his life. There were still consequences, but Nathan's intervention on God's instructions saved David from utter catastrophe.

At-A-Glance

1. God Reveals (2 Samuel 12:1–7)
 2. God Reforms (vv. 7–9)
 3. God Redeems (vv. 13–15)

In Depth

1. God Reveals (2 Samuel 12:1–7)

God used Nathan to reveal to David the truth of his own actions. Similarly, Christ would use many parables during His ministry. Preaching and teaching by illustration can actually lead to greater revelation in some cases.

In verse 5, David's anger reached its highest point, as he was insulted on behalf of the poor man and his beloved lamb. Sin causes us to be arrogant and to become blind to the reality that we have caused damage by our actions. David had not just damaged Uriah, he had taken his life in order to take his wife. This extremity was no secret—yet God used Nathan to reveal the horror of this behavior to David so that he could see himself from another perspective.

In this moment of revelation, David went from being royal to wrong, and the anger he demonstrated would soon be turned toward himself. God reveals our wrongs to us so that we can take corrective action. David was no stranger to repentance, but he had let this practice lapse. Revelation has a way of rerouting us from disaster.

If God were to reveal your sins to the public, what could you stand to lose? Friendships? Respect? Livelihood?

2. God Reforms (vv. 7–9)

"Thou art the man!" These words ring from the voice of Nathan, and David stands accused in his own royal chamber. His guilt is inescapable, and his accuser is not the prophet, but Almighty God Himself. Truly there can be no remission of sin without repentance, and there can be no repentance without an acknowledgment of guilt. God's reform is thorough. God is not interested in temporary remedies that will spare our feelings or compromise right and wrong. Instead, God can only reform us when we yield to Him, acknowledge His righteousness and admit our wrong.

After the initial shock of the revelation of David's guilt, Nathan continues by prophetically declaring all the many reasons David had no excuse for what he had done. Again, revelation leads to reformation, as we all must account for our wrongdoings, and evaluate how to make better choices in the future. David had been blessed to accomplish great things. He had absolutely no reason to take his soldier's life and seduce his wife. He did so simply because he could.

What privileges have we abused, knowing that it would displease God and harm ourselves in the long run?

3. God Redeems (vv. 13–15)

The beauty of the grace of God is that it covers a multitude of sins. David's confession is refreshing, considering our political climate which finds many powerful leaders quite unrepentant and indignant at the notion that they may be wrong. In David's case, he had the power as a king to command right and wrong to be precisely what he chose. Yet, by recognizing God's revelation and accepting God's reformation, he could now fully receive God's redemption.

"I have sinned against the LORD." These simple words are very difficult to say sometimes, but they are no less vital to the quality of our Christian life. We are not capable of living a sin-free life. However, we are entirely free from sin because of God's redeeming grace.

In yet another parallel similar to the poor man's lamb, God used Bathsheba's child as an example for our faith. While the child had committed no sin in being conceived, it was still conceived in sin, and would no doubt have lived a life of scorn, shame, and mistreatment. While the loss of the child was incredibly painful, it is a reminder that God Himself sacrificed His own Son so that the sins of the entire world may be forgiven. David and Bathsheba's child died as punishment for sin, but he was still not to be the propitiation for all sin. David is a perfect example of God's ability to expose, admonish, and forgive those He loves.

Has God ever taken something from you then provided something even better than what you lost?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Nathan risking when he went to speak to David (2 Samuel 12:1)?
2. How do we know David was truly repentant for his sin (v. 13)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did Nathan risk his own safety by confronting David?
2. Although David had been warned that this son would die, he begged God to spare the child's life. Why did God allow the child to die anyway?

Liberating Lesson

Although David eventually was restored to favor with God, he had to endure the consequences of his sin. Here, we have an example of what it means to be humble before God, even as we retain prominence in other areas. The fact is that no one is exempt from the truth. Right is right and wrong is wrong, regardless of our station in life. Fortunately, God so loved the entire world that He gave His Son, so that those who believe shall not perish in their sin, but shall have everlasting life.

Application for Activation

In our litigious society, there is often a price tag placed on forgiveness. While we can perhaps repay some debts with money or time, true repentance requires humility, admission, and acceptance of our need for God's redeeming power. How should this understanding of forgiveness be applied to the questions of reparations or restorative justice?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

2 Samuel 12:1–9, 13–15

Scripture unabashedly chronicles King David's absolute disregard to God's Law and ordinances by coveting and committing adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11). David lusted for Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his top fighters (2 Samuel 23:39). He has sex with her while Uriah is in the battlefield fighting to defend David and Israel. Since David abused his position of king to have sex with Bathsheba when she had no power to deny him, this is rape. To cover up his crime, David invites Uriah home from the battle. He tries to entice Uriah to go home and sleep with Bathsheba. His plan fails. Then David orders Uriah killed in battle by putting him in a position where he would not escape. His orders are carried out—Uriah is killed with enemy weapons. Following Uriah's death, King David takes Bathsheba as his wife and bears him a son. The concluding sentence of the last verse of the chapter sets up the stage for the dramatic saga that would follow, which is the basis of our discussion "...But the LORD was displeased with what David had done" (11:27). The drama that follows demonstrates certain aspects of God's attribute: a righteous and a just God; a merciful and gracious God, and a God who never winks at sin no matter who commits it.

1 And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. 2 The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: 3 But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

The author brings another character into the unfolding drama, Nathan, a prophet of God. After the birth of Bathsheba's son, the Lord sends Nathan to David. David is familiar with Nathan as God's prophet. Earlier, God had used Nathan to deliver a message of God's covenant relationship with David and his descendants (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17:1–15). It is not unusual for the prophet to visit the king. However, unbeknownst to David, the prophet has come this time not with praise, but with rebuke.

Probably David thought that he has succeeded in concealing his sin because no one challenged him or confronted him about it. It is likely that no one had the courage to challenge him because of his position as king. It should be noted that David's sin against Uriah was not a secret. The people in the kingdom knew about it—from the servant he sent to call Bathsheba, to the servants who stayed with Uriah when he refused to go his house, to the general who positioned Uriah at the frontlines to be murdered. Finally, taking Bathsheba to be his wife was not hidden. People must have gossiped about it, but no one dared challenge him.

As chapter 11 reveals, David started little by little until he was overtaken by sin and injustice. Like most people in a high position who think they can do anything and go free, especially against the poor and the less privileged, David thought he could do anything without challenge. We may hide our sin from humans and shield ourselves in injustice, but not with God. He sees and knows everything—nothing can be hidden from Him. David is familiar with this God, but self-indulgence and sinful pleasures (adultery, covetousness, injustice) cloud his judgment. God sends Nathan to David to challenge him with his sin.

Nathan begins with a story of a rich man who, in spite of having everything, steals a poor neighbor's only ewe to entertain his guest. Using a story or a parable to reveal a truth is customary in the Jewish culture (Ezekiel 17:1–4; 24:3–5). Jesus often used parables to illustrate the truth of the Gospel (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 15; 18 etc.). It is common among the Igbo people of Nigeria to use parables in their conversation or to illustrate a point. Here Nathan employs the same method to illustrate the severity of David's sin. However, David is unaware that he is the person being described in the story.

The narrator presents an extreme contrast between the rich and the poor man. The Jewish economy had always been agriculturally based. Therefore, wealth in the Jewish culture was determined by the number of flocks or herds one possessed. David was a shepherd before he became king. "Flocks" and "herds" can be used synonymously; however specifically "flocks" (Heb. tso'n, TSONE) refers mainly to a fleet of sheep and goats, while "herds" (Heb. baqar, baw-KAWR) refer to cattle and horses. The rich man had "exceeding many" of them. In contrast, the poor man had nothing except "one little ewe lamb, which he bought and nourished up." The lamb grew in the family with his children; it ate with them and even drank from the same cup and "lay in his bosom." To the poor man this lamb was more than a pet, it "was unto him as a daughter." It was all he had; he cherished and loved it.

4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. 5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: 6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

As a shepherd, David must have been very interested in the story. Nonetheless, Nathan had a purpose in mind to catch David off guard in his own words in order to present his case. Jews are known for their hospitality, especially to visitors. It is common practice for a Jew to attend to guests, expected or unexpected, by feeding them. Abraham entertained the three visitors who turned to be angels by taking from his flock (Genesis 18:1–8). The writer of Hebrews instructs, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2). In this story, according to Nathan, the rich man has a guest. Instead of taking from his numerous flocks and herds, he takes the poor man's only ewe to entertain his visitor.

On hearing the story, David is very angry against the rich man for committing such a heinous act. As a king, David was obligated to see that the poor receive justice. Enraged by such despicable behavior, David exclaims that the death penalty is fitting for a man who would do such a wicked thing. The phrase "David's anger was greatly kindled..." describes the enormity of David's anger against the rich man. The word "kindled" (Heb. kharah, khaw- RAW) means that his anger was ignited as in a flame of fire. He burned with anger. He then swears that this wicked man must die. The phrase "as the Lord liveth" is the most solemn oath pronounced in the name of the reigning king (Genesis 42:15), a deity (Psalm 16:4), or the Lord Himself as we have here (Judges 8:19; 14:39; Deuteronomy 6:13). It is often used to show the importance of the statement or an irrevocable oath or pledge.

David avows that the rich man must pay a restitution of four lambs for the one he stole from the poor man according to the Law (Exodus 22:1). Further, however, he also demands the rich man's life. The Mosaic Law does not provide such harsh penalty for property theft, though it does for kidnapping (Exodus 21:16). However, David probably saw this offence in that light—it is equivalent to kidnapping and murder. To David, the poor man deserved justice, and the rich man's behavior deserved restitution and death.

David then gives the reason the rich should pay with his life, "because he had no pity." This Hebrew word for having pity (*khamal*, *khaw*— MALL) also means showing compassion or sparing (from death). Even though David says the rich man had no *khamal*, that is exactly the word Nathan used for the man's action earlier in the story when he "spared" (v. 4) the animals from his own flock and instead took from the poor man. The rich man has pity for himself and his own possessions, but none for his neighbor. This is exactly David's offense. Not only did he take Uriah's wife; he also ordered Uriah killed and showed no compassion to spare him from David's snowballing sin. Ironically, David was pronouncing his own punishment not realizing he was the person the story was about. Indeed, what he did to Bathsheba and to Uriah deserved death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22–24).

It is interesting to note that things have not changed or improved much since Biblical times. The axiom, "the rich get richer, the poor gets poorer" is very much alive today. Injustice is still a common occurrence; the rich stealing from the poor is still a common phenomenon in our society. The rich still extort the poor and the needy; people in positions of authority use their office and position to steal from those who are less rich, and they are even celebrated. There is uninhibited injustice all over the world.

7 And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; 8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

The story reaches its climax when Nathan tells David, "Thou art the man." Through Nathan, the Lord states His case against David. The phrase "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel" signifies the authenticity of Nathan's message—the charge is directly from the very God whom David is familiar with—the Lord God of Israel. Nathan uses the Jewish personal name of God, *Yahweh*, who is also the God of Israel referring to the Lord's covenant relationship with Israel.

The Lord lays His charges against David. He reminds him of the Lord's goodness to him— He gave him everything he possessed and would have given more. The Lord anointed him king of Israel in place of Saul; the Lord protected him when Saul sought his life. The Lord gave David Saul's palace, including his wives, as was the custom of the day. So David was at liberty to take his predecessor's wives. Scripture does not indicate this was a large harem to inherit as Saul had only one wife (1 Samuel 14:50) and one concubine (2 Samuel 3:7), but it was still more than was usual, especially since David already had two wives of his own by this point (1 Samuel 25:42–44).

In addition, the Lord has placed him over the house of Israel and Judah. As the king, David has everything in Israel and Judah at his disposal; he is given the whole nation. He has power to choose from among the daughters of Judah and Israel to take young virgins as wives if he wishes. If all this isn't enough, the Lord continues, "I would have given you more." Therefore, it doesn't make sense to steal and murder in order to cover sin.

9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

David is guilty of all charges. After stating His case, the Lord asks David a conscience–piercing question, “why?”—“Wherefore (why) hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight?” The word “despised” is the Hebrew word *bazah* (baw–ZAW), which means to disesteem, disdain, contempt, or disrespect. By this, David had committed two serious sins. First, he had forgotten the goodness of the Lord who gave him everything he had and would have given him more (vv. 7–8). Second, David had disrespected the Lord’s commandment and treated it with contempt instead of upholding it, which means disregarding the Lord. This was the same sin Saul committed, which forced the Lord to take the kingdom from him and give to David, whom the Lord called “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). David showed no regard for the Lord’s commandment by coveting, committing adultery, bearing false witness, and committing murder. David had broken four of the Ten Commandments and thought he could get away with it. Notice that God lays the blame for Uriah’s death at David’s hand, even though another person held the sword that slew the Hittite.

Verses 10 to 12 contain the consequences of David’s sin. There, the Lord shows that He is a just God, that every sin has its consequences, and that He is not a respecter of persons, whether a king or a commoner. Each one of the consequences pronounced against David for his sin against Uriah comes to pass. Because David murdered Uriah and took his wife: 1) Murder was constant in his household (2 Samuel 13:26–30; 1 Kings 2:23–25); 2) There was constant rebellion against him by his family (2 Samuel 15:13); 3) His wives were given to another in public (2 Samuel 16:20–23); and 4) David’s first child by Bathsheba died (2 Samuel 12:18).

13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. 14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. 15 And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

After Nathan confronted David with his sin and its consequences, David confessed and said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Unlike Saul who tried to give excuses for his disregard for the Law of the Lord (1 Samuel 13:22ff.), David did not try to justify his sin or blame anyone else. He readily admits his sin and confesses right away, acknowledging that it is the Lord he has sinned against. The substance of the confession is recorded as Psalm 51.

After David confesses, Nathan can tell him of God’s forgiveness. David’s sin is not only forgiven, but the Lord gracefully releases him from the customary death penalty for adultery and murder (Leviticus 20:10; 24:17, 21), the penalty which David himself pronounced on the “rich man” (v. 5). David experienced the joy of knowing his sin is forgiven (Psalm 23:1, 5; 51:8, 12). God shows here how He is gracious and shows mercy to those who genuinely repent of their sin.

Although, David is totally forgiven, he still has to bear the consequences for his action. Therefore, this firstborn son of David and Bathsheba shall die, Nathan pronounces. Here we encounter the essence of God’s nature and attributes. He is gracious and merciful, yet He is still a righteous and just God. He executes justice and equity to all people, irrespective of who they are or the position they occupy. Every sin committed is against the Lord, as David acknowledges (Psalm 51:4). By his action, David has given God’s enemies an occasion to blaspheme the Lord’s name. Some have suggested that had the child lived, God’s name would have been dishonored among Israel’s pagan neighbors.

Even though David does not die for his sin, the child born to Bathsheba from David's sinful encounter does die. As we wrestle with this difficult event, we must remember two facts about God's involvement in David's life. Firstly, the Lord spared David's life because of His covenant promise to establish David's kingdom from his offspring (2 Samuel 7:11–12; 12:24–25). Secondly, the death of the child was not a judgment on the child being born out of wedlock, but a judgment against David for his sin. Every sin has its consequences. While God forgave David's sin, He did not negate its consequences.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

David's Sin with Bathsheba
(2 Samuel 11:1-13)

TUESDAY

David Murders Bathsheba's Husband
(2 Samuel 11:14-27)

WEDNESDAY

Walk in the Light
(1 John 1:5-10)

THURSDAY

Create in Me a Clean Heart
(Psalm 51:1-14)

FRIDAY

Redemption Through Repentance
(Psalm 32)

SATURDAY

Christ, the Sacrifice for Our Sins
(1 John 2:1-11)

SUNDAY

Nathan Tells a Pointed Parable
(2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13-15)