

TCE Sermon 29 July 2018 - David and Bathsheba

2 Samuel 11

Good morning everyone! Before I start, allow me to say a prayer for us all.

(PRAYER)

INTRODUCTION

For the past 2 Sundays, Pastor Francis has been preaching from 2 Sam 6 & 7, looking at, among other things, David and how he worshipped, David and his desire to build a temple for God so that God had a permanent place of worship. Today we still remain with David, but we switch gears to look at different side to David.

When I was presented with the opportunity to preach this particular Sunday, I jumped at the chance especially when I saw which bible readings were scheduled for today. The choice as to which bible passage I wanted to preach on was quite easily made. David and Bathsheba. Not because it is a passage that virtually everyone, even the unchurched, knows; not because it is a story that belongs more in a bad afternoon soap opera than in the bible, what with illicit intercourse, palace intrigue, murder, war, death, confrontation, repentance, redemption, all condensed in two chapters. So not because it is famous, and not because it is a page-turner, but because I seriously wondered whether there were any insights I could add as a female person to this testosterone-filled bible passage. In fact, the female counterpart in this sordid tale, has her name mentioned all of one time

whereas David's name is plastered all over the page. And I don't think that the reason for it is because this story is only about David and his sin (or sins). I think the Scripture writer (God ultimately) has chosen his words so carefully so as to give us some striking insights to our human nature that I can only marvel at His brilliance. That was the teaser. Somewhere in this sermon, I will mention why I think Bathsheba's name was deliberately withheld and how that is a thinly veiled underlying sociological commentary by the Scripture writer. But first, I want to set up the context of our 2 Samuel 11 passage and give a summary of this story that goes beyond the passage that we read today.

In 2 Sam 10, the chapter before, we are given an account of David's war against the Ammonites. He leads his army into war and wins resoundingly. So why is this important information when we are looking at chapter 11? Firstly, we know David is probably at the height of his military career, he has been winning battle after battle. Secondly, we know he is king and we know what kings do in those days - they go out to war with their men and they fight alongside them. This fact is confirmed by the first verse of chapter 11, verse 1: "In the spring, **when** kings go out to war...".

Then comes the sorry tale of David's fall in chapter 11. David sees the girl, asks about the girl, gets the girl to his palace, sleeps with her, gets her pregnant, plots to cover up his actions by re-calling the girl's husband back from the frontlines in the hope that the husband would sleep with his wife

and so cover up David's indiscretion. Plan A fails, so David plots Plan B which is to get the girl's husband killed in the frontlines. Plan B succeeds. The husband is killed, the girl becomes David's wife and she gives birth to a son. But the story of chapter 11 must be told with chapter 12. In chapter 12 God sends Nathan his prophet to confront David. David repents and Nathan tells him that one consequence of his sin (among others) is that the child born out of this affair will have to die. Child dies, but David and Bathsheba will have another child called Solomon. David is pictured at the end of chapter 12 doing what kings do - David goes out to war against the Ammonites and wins the war.

Do you see how brilliantly the story is structured in such a way that it comes a full circle? Brilliant story-telling you would say. As any writer of fiction knows, to write a good ending, you need to tie up all the loose ends in the story. But do you also see why the Scripture writer ends the Bathsheba story in the same way where we started at the end of chapter 10? David goes out to war, wins the war. End of chapter 12. Same thing. Why? Well, I think this is the reason why: the Scripture writer wanted us to know that David has been fully restored to his position and his relationship vis-a-vis God despite having made the biggest mistake in his entire life. Yes the consequences of David's sin was still come, but positionally, his relationship with God has been restored. This idea has been artfully worked in using a circular storytelling method.

So what else can we learn from this story? Many things! But my focus will be on the insights into our human nature as revealed by this biblical text.

And within this bracket, these are the 4 main points I see:

- 1) Sin's opportunity - when does sin get's it's chance?
- 2) Sin's insidiousness - how subtly sin enters
- 3) Sin's depravity - how far we would go when sin has gotten a hold on us
- 4) Redemption's breadth - how far reaching God's redemption and forgiveness is

1) Sin's opportunity

What was David doing when he saw Bathsheba? He was taking a walk on the roof of his palace one evening. We are told that he got out of his bed to do that. What has he been doing the whole day? Lying in bed? We don't know but the Scripture writer saw it fit to include this little detail of him which already leads us to be asking questions about David.

What was David supposed to be doing when he saw Bathsheba? Verse 1 very clearly states what the writer thinks David should have been doing. In the spring, when kings go out to war, David sent Joab but David remained at Jerusalem. David was supposed to be out with his men in battle, but he instead is lounging around till late afternoon in the comfort of his palace. What is the lesson here? When does sin get's its opportunity? Sin is

able to put a foot in the door when we are not doing something we know we ought to be doing. Hear me in this. I am not saying that David shouldn't have been taking a break. Everyone needs to rest some time. Even God rested on the 7th day of creation. Maybe David was tired of all the fighting, maybe he genuinely thought Joab his commander could handle the skirmish. That is not the point. The point is that even if David had the most genuine of intentions in staying home when he should have been out in battle, in not doing what he should have been doing, he opened the door to sin just this tiny bit. But just this tiny bit was enough to start the domino of actions which led to terrible consequences.

What was Bathsheba doing when David saw her? She was bathing. What was Bathsheba supposed to be doing? We don't know, Scripture doesn't tell us. However, personally for me reading that account, I found it really odd if she was up on the roof bathing. You know why? Have you ever tried filling a bath by hand? Well, as many of you know, I have kids about this big at home. And we have one of those baby splash pools about 1.5metres across. You have seen those things sold everywhere, especially now in this heatwave, blue with 3 inflatable rings that you need to blow up? One summer, I nicely inflated this pool, filled it halfway with water from the garden hose and told my kids: Wow pool, go splash away. Kids get in, the oldest screams out "ahhh coldddd!" So what does this mother do? I go boil water and filled up my biggest pan with hot water. Up and down I went from

kitchen to garden to kitchen to garden at least 10 times each time with my pan of hot water and each time the kids still went “ahh cold!”. So in the end I said, “whatever, you don’t want to get in the water, its fine with me!”

What’s the point of my story? It is hard work filling a bath by hand. After 10 pans I raised the water level by about this much (inch size). So of course, when I read about Bathsheba’s bath, the first thing I think is, is she crazy? Getting a bath filled on the roof? Going up and down the stairs with a terracotta water pitcher on your head? Seriously??! Remember this was about the 10th century, B.C. 1000BC. Water wasn’t stored on roofs. Most of the domestic water you needed was for your animals, and you didn’t keep your animals on the roof. Was Bathsheba nuts or was she thinking about something else?

Now you have to listen carefully here as to what I am saying: I am **not** saying that David was enticed and therefore justified. Everything that David did in this episode was wrong. The prophet Nathan unequivocally pointed that out to David. I am **not** saying that Bathsheba was asking for it. What I **am** saying, draws from Apostle Paul’s principles (you can find it variously in Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians) when he talks about the freedom we have in Christ, if we by doing something that is wholly within our right to do may cause someone else to stumble, then we shouldn’t be doing it. This principle is gender neutral, it is equally valid for men as for women.

The question to us all is: what is it that we are not doing that we ought to be doing? Or more specifically, using the David and Bathsheba's story, for the men: the first look could have been accidental, but the second look was on purpose. For the women: we are fortunate to be born in a time when we are not longer considered someone else's property, we have all kinds of freedoms, to bath, dress however we want (or undress in Bathsheba's case), but make sure that our freedoms do not cause someone else to stumble. No one said the Christian walk was easy.

Consider this: the giant sequoia tree, biggest trees in the world. Do you know how it begins life? As a seed, about 3mm in size. It is easier to crush a seed this size, that to take down a sequoia. Don't even give sin a tiny opportunity. Sin kills. Kill sin, before it kills you and others around you.

2) Sin's insidiousness

What do I mean by that? Sin is so sly and so subtle that it is able to deceive us even when we love God, even when we are trying to follow him with all our hearts. For David it started so simply, so innocently, he stayed home in the spring when kings go out to war. I think for most of us, when we read this episode of David's life, we read it at arm's length. It could never happen to me, I would never sink so low as to murder, I couldn't even hurt a fly! The moment we think that, we have just taken a step closer in that direction. That's why I say sin is sly and subtle. Do you think David, who is

described as the man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14), David on whom the Spirit of God came upon powerfully when he was anointed by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13), David the writer of all those beautiful psalms thought he could commit murder? David writes in Psa 40:8 "I delight to do your will, your law is within my heart". How many of us can honestly claim that? David did, but yet, as a commentator quips: so much for the law being in David's heart, with one Bathsheba incident, David breaks half of the 10 Commandments! How many of us have faced giants in our youth, faced technically impossible situations, with a faith like David's when he faced Goliath? How many of us have come within striking distance of our arch enemy, whose aim is to kill you, and yet refuse to lift a hand, like David did to Saul who was pursuing him (1 Sam 24)? Do we really think we are any better than David? But yet, when we read David's story with Bathsheba, we think, nahhh, that's not me, that may have happened to David but no-no, it could never happen to me! What's that? Spiritual pride? Complacency?

Do you know what David's story shows me? It shows me that within all of us, even when we have the Spirit of God in us, we are all capable of the most horrendous sins. Doesn't matter what position you hold in church, whether you sit on the church council or elder board, whether you pastor a church or even whether you are standing here giving a message. I think especially when we are in a position of power, we need to guard ourselves. Remember David? I said he was probably at the height of his career.

Honestly, that thought really scares me. It reminds me I need to constantly fall upon the grace of God. It reminds me that my heart is deceitful beyond measure because it tells me I am doing ok when I am not and find justifications, even Godly justifications, for ungodly desires.

3) Sin's depravity

Sin is not only sly and subtle, it is completely depraved. David, at the point when he saw Bathsheba, had his heart set on something else other than God. And what your heart most desires, your will will find the strength to get at it, and your mind will rationalise and give good reasons for it. What was David told when he asked someone to find out the woman's identity?

David was informed that the woman was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. This is the only time her name was mentioned in the story.

I promised earlier to tell you why I think the Scripture-writer did that. I think the writer was reflecting upon our human nature to objectify and use. What do I mean? When someone has a name, he or she is a person as opposed to an object, she is somebody's daughter, somebody's wife, somebody's mother. We use objects to satisfy our needs and desires. We do not use people to satisfy our own needs and desires. (I know we do, but we shouldn't). When we start objectifying people, it makes it easier to use them for our own purposes. I was starkly reminded of this fact just a week ago when we visited the holocaust memorial in Paris. The detainees were

stripped of their names and their identities and given just a number when they entered the camps. They were no longer people. They became objects. We all know how that story ends. We do not need a war to objectify people. We do it all the time.

The Scripture writer in giving Bathsheba a name at that point in the story was saying: she is a person, and not an object to be used. But David, caught within sin's depravity skips over that fact and uses Bathsheba anyway. She has been made an object and for the rest of the story, she is no longer referred to by name.

What else was significant about Bathsheba's identity? It was usual in the culture to be addressed as son or daughter of somebody, but to be addressed as the wife of someone was unusual unless the person wanted expressly to highlight her married status to David. The answer to David's query should have stopped David in his tracks on at least two counts: First, Bathsheba is a married woman; second, Bathsheba is the wife of Uriah. Not just any man, Uriah! Uriah happens to be one of David's most loyal and trusted men. He is given special mention as one of David's "mighty men" (2 Sam 23, 1 Chr 11). He has been with David almost right from the start. Uriah would have given his life fighting for David. See what I mean about sin's depravity? David had his mind focused on just that one thing which he had to have at that point, that even the fact that he would be betraying one of his closest men didn't stop him. I can only imagine what kind of twisted reasons

David gave himself when he took Bathsheba. That's what happens when the greatest desire of your heart isn't God. That which you most desire, however unreachable it is, however forbidden it is, you will find the strength to get it, and your mind will find the reasons and rationale for it. That's true isn't it? Think about what Eve said when she wanted to eat the forbidden fruit in the garden. We always give ourselves very good reasons for our actions because we need to convince ourselves that we are actually good people.

Now I have to tell you some very bad news: Sin's total depravity means that our entire being, our physical being, our hearts, our thoughts, our emotions, our minds have been corrupted (Rom 3:23). It is not simply just falling slightly off the target. It falls completely short of the target. That is not to say that we all do only bad things all the time. Of course we do some good things some times and for some people, oftentimes. But when we stand before God, it isn't a question of him weighing our good deeds and our bad deeds and if your good outweighs the bad, yes!, welcome into heaven. It is not about us doing, it's about us being. The totalness of this depravity doesn't refer to how much or how intensely bad our actions are. It means that **everything** of what we are, has been touched by sin. There is no way we can crawl out of ourselves. That's why someone like David, even though he has the Spirit of God in him, even though he says he delights to do God's will, can still choose to sin. Are we any better than David? What does your

heart most desire right now in your life? Is there an unspoken desire in your heart that you still need to release to God?

4) The breadth of redemption

If I end this sermon right now, you are all going out depressed. Where is the good news in this? Oh there is good news. There is very good news. I still have my last point. Point 4) the breadth of redemption. In 2 Sam 12:1, who is the one acting in David's redemption and reconciliation? David or the Lord? It is the Lord! And this is consistent with what we see in the entire biblical account from Genesis all the way to Revelation. Man walks away from God. God goes out to seek us out. This is the picture of our gracious and long-suffering Father in heaven. Look at what God says about David's deed? God was displeased (2 Sam 11:27), David had despised God's word and done what was evil in his eyes (2 Sam 12:9), David had utterly scorned the Lord by his deed (2 Sam 12:14). Now God feels utterly scorned by David, yet God reaches out first in reconciliation. Oh what lessons we need to learn from that when someone offends us! And David isn't the only one who was scorned God, we all have. Rom 5:10 tells us that when we were yet enemies of God, God reconciled us to Him through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. And **that** is the good news. When we were helpless and unable to help ourselves out of the mess we created, God reached out to us and sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross to pay for all of our wrongs with his blood. When we accept that fact, that it is not what we have done but what Jesus

has done for us, then we know we have assurance of pardon. And as we saw with David at the end of chapter 12, when David repented, God forgave and restored David back to the relationship he had with God before his biggest mess up of his life. This is our God. And more incredibly, that to me reveals the ultimate grace of our God, the other child David and Bathsheba had - Solomon? The line leads all the way to Jesus. This is our God. What an amazing picture of not only full restoration, but complete redemption. God was able to take biggest mistake and sin in David's life and turn it around and made something beautiful out of it. This is our God. There is nothing that God cannot restore and redeem.

There's probably some here who think you have majorly messed up your life, you made some stupid mistakes and feel God is far away. He has always been near and so long as you turn to Him and lay it all down at his feet, He is right there, willing and able to restore you back to a right relationship with Him. Are you willing to do that?

Let me pray for us.