

**+ 2 Samuel 12:1-13 + The Lord Has Taken Away Your Sin +
+ 12th Sunday after Pentecost + 19 August 2012 +¹**

How could David? Doesn't that question just jump off the page at you as you hear the condemning words of Nathan the prophet? **"You are the man!"** How could David be so cold, so callous, so unflinchingly willing to disregard God's holy will—the God who had been so good to him?

It doesn't make any sense! This is David we're talking about—the man **"after the Lord's own heart"** (1 Samuel 13:14), the man who had fearlessly taken on the gigantic champion of the Philistines and won because he trusted in what the Lord could do, the man whose conscience had trouble simply because he cut off a little piece of King Saul's robe even as Saul sought to wipe David off the face of the earth. This is David—the fighting general who loved his men so much, that when they broke through enemy lines to bring him a special treat—a drink of water from his hometown well—poured it out before the Lord because to him drinking that water would've been like drinking the blood of his dear soldiers. This is David—the one whom the prophets would hold up as the image of the royal Savior to come, and yet the David we see in 2 Samuel 12 looks nothing like that Savior-King to come. No, he looks just like any other pagan king, like any other sinner.

How did we get here? How could David become so callous and cold that he let a whole year pass before admitting his sin? How did David get there?

It all started the year before. The spring arrived and, as was common in those days, it was time for the warrior-king to take his troops out into the field for battle against the pagan Ammonites. For some reason, David didn't go out that spring. He told Joab his general to take the army out for battle. "I'm just gonna sit this one out." The writer doesn't tell us why. Perhaps David was growing weary of the long campaigns through the spring and summer, but even so his army fought well without him. David himself failed miserably against the more dangerous enemy army of Satan and his sinful nature. One evening David went for a walk on his palace roof and looking down on the city of Jerusalem he spotted a beautiful woman bathing on the roof of her home. With one lingering look of lust, David unleashed a rapidly plunging avalanche of sin that soon consumed Bathsheba, his general Joab, the entire Israelite army, and finally the life of Bathsheba's faithful husband and David's faithful soldier, Uriah. With shockingly cold and cynical calculation, David turned evil into good and good into evil making this whole account undeniably terrifying, because in David you see what sin can do.

David showed that any Christian is capable of any sin. In his case, that meant taking another man's wife for himself, impregnating her, and then sending her husband back to the front lines unwittingly carrying his own death warrant with him so David could have Uriah die conveniently at the hands of the Ammonites. Then to continue the cover-up, David brought the grieving widow, Bathsheba, "mercifully" into his home to be his wife. No twisted Hollywood plot could devise a more tragic story, and it got even worse because **"the man after the Lord's own heart"** soon grew callous and cold to the cries of his conscience. For over a year he refused to repent, and he felt it. His body rebelled with pain. Sleep left him. The people began to whisper as they did the math when Bathsheba's child was born. Rumors spread to enemy kingdoms that the "holy" King of Israel was really a sham, and David's actions brought contempt to the name of the Lord.

Now it wouldn't be surprising if there was any fear in Nathan's mind as he approached the royal palace after a year. "If the king was so willing to do what he did to get his way, what could he do to me when I confront him?" You see, Nathan was on a mission—to confront the king as the messenger of the holy God who knows all things and sees all things and judges all with his holy will. So Nathan told the shepherd-king a story that cut him to the heart. **"There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."** David **"burned with anger"** as he condemned the rich man's detestable actions, but in doing so, David condemned himself.

"You are the man!", Nathan shouted as he pointed at the guilty king...and the lightning bolt of God's holy Law struck right to David's heart. "How could you do this, David? How could you completely disregard all that your

¹ Some of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from an Ash Wednesday 2009 sermon by Prof. Kenneth Cherney.

gracious Lord has done for you and given you over the years? Don't you think God could've given more? How could you, David?" The Lord had not deprived him. David didn't come from a dysfunctional family. He didn't suffer from low self-esteem. No, David committed those grave sins because he could. Yes, David was a believer, but his evil sinful nature still lurked within his heart ready to strike at the first opportunity. When opportunity came, David's soul was soon in danger.

That's terrifying to you and me, because deep down you and I know that that same evil lurks within our own hearts. Think of those times when the main thing that kept you from sinning or letting that inner evil strike was that you lacked an opportunity like David's. The truth is our Lord isn't impressed when you fail to break one of his holy commandments in the grossest possible way simply because you don't have the opportunity or the guts to carry it out. Such a reality check brings you and me to our knees because our spiritual problem goes deeper than simply not being nice to others. The condemning finger of God's holy Law points at your heart and mine and cries out, "**You are the man. You are the woman...and you despised me!**" How could you? How could I? How could David?

...Or perhaps the question we should be asking is really "How could God?" When the Lord's prophet condemned David, the king confessed, "**I have sinned against the LORD.**" There's no drawn out confession of sins, no sackcloth and ashes, no weeping or promises to stay off rooftops—although those things would've been appropriate. Just simply, "**I have sinned against the LORD**", and without blinking Nathan tells David, "**The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.**" That's it. No demands for penance. No probation period. No "if you'll believe" or "if you accept God's forgiveness right now", not even a demand for an apology to Uriah's family. No, just "**The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.**"

Oh, there were consequences for David's sinful actions. The child of his adultery would soon die. The sword and violence would never depart from David's house. His own sons would bring rebellion and disgrace to his family even causing him to be driven from Jerusalem for a time, but none of those consequences was ever to make up for what David did. Even though David had wiped his feet on the Lord's generosity and brought contempt to his holy name, David once again became "**the man after the Lord's own heart**". He still remained king. How could God do that? How could God so unconditionally forgive? God could because he punished the "**Son of David**" who was to come—not Solomon or Hezekiah or Josiah or even Joseph, but the One who was both David's Son and David's Lord—Jesus.

When Jesus finally arrived, that "**Son of David**" paid for all those ugly, disgusting, awful sins that David and his ancestors and his descendants had committed. Unlike his ancestor, Jesus lived the perfect life David could not—that perfect life you and I cannot. His perfect life was not about avoiding sin because he lacked the opportunity. No, he perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father's holy will in every thought, every word, every action because it was his heavenly Father's holy will. He proved to be the perfect "**man after the Lord's own heart**" that David could not.

Then this Jesus, this "**Son of David**" paid for those sins with his own life given and poured out on a bloody cross. Jesus endured the humiliation and pain and hell that David deserved—yes, the same you and I earn every day. By his own perfect life and his own innocent death (for he deserved not the death he suffered), Jesus made God's forgiveness "unconditional", no strings attached, not a license to sin, but "unconditional forgiveness" that flows from the merciful and loving heart of our God, the forgiveness that changes lives like yours and mine forever.

That forgiveness goes far deeper than those times when you just haven't been nice to someone or forgot about God for a moment. That forgiveness, earned and paid with the blood of the holy Lamb of God, is forgiveness for adultery and immorality and murder, for envy and rage and greed and lies and hatred. It's forgiveness for the evil sin inside each and every one of us—the sin that would shock our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to the core if they knew it. Jesus didn't die to make you nice. He died to declare you "not guilty" in God's sight and to reconcile you to your holy God.

If you're not sure about that, if your heart still condemns you even after you've heard the blessed pronouncement of forgiveness from your pastor, then look to the cross and run to that cross. Bring your secret sins and your sinful thoughts. Bring your public sins and all the guilt of your past, and see there in the crucified "**Son of David**" your forgiveness in all its bloody glory. Then run to his tomb and look inside to see the guarantee of your forgiveness in the emptiness of that tomb. See that when Jesus left that tomb, he left behind all the guilt of your sins and remembers them no more for "**the LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.**" Yes, God did that. He did because he could do that—for you. Amen.