

The Fall of God's King

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- [0 : 0 0] As you can see on the screen, this morning's reading can be found on page 314 of the Church!
- David and Bathsheba. In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army.
- They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabba, but David remained in Jerusalem. One evening, David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace.
- And from the roof, he saw a woman washing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, she is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.
- Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.
- [1 : 2 9] Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, I'm pregnant. So David sent this word to Joab, send me Uriah the Hittite.
- And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was, how the soldiers were, and how their war was going. Then David said to Uriah, go down to your house and wash your feet.
- So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.
- David was told Uriah did not go home. So he asked Uriah, haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?
- Uriah said to David, the ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country.
- [2 : 3 8] How could I go to my house and eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing. Then David said to him, stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.
- So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk.
- But in the evening, Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants. He did not go home. In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab.
- He sent it with Uriah. In it, he wrote, put Uriah out in the front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die.
- When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him.
- [3 : 4 4] After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.
- The Lord sent Nathan to David, and when he came to him, he said, 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 that he 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 against the man and said to Nathan, As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die.

[5 : 05] He must pay for that lamb four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity. Then Nathan said to David, You are the man.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Keep those chapters open.

They'll be helpful for us and a reminder as well that there's prayer available after the service. If you make your way towards the back or find a staff member, that would be a wise thing to do.

Some sermons are harder to preach than others. And are harder to sit under than others.

Some passages are pure and unadulterated joy. They show us God's kindness. They remind us of the hope that is found in his character. They're beautiful.

[6 : 09] And last week was like that for me as we looked at David and Mephibosheth. Some sermons are difficult because they are exegetically difficult. That is, there are multiple ways to understand and apply what God's word is saying.

And so that can make it difficult. But they aren't the most difficult sermons. Some sermons are difficult because they are controversial culturally.

They rub up against the tide of our culture. And when you preach it, or when you sit under it, you know that there will be opposition. But they aren't the most difficult sermons.

The most difficult sermons are the ones that force me as a preacher, and us as a congregation to stare into the brokenness of the world around us.

They get past the surface level where so much of our lives are lived. They deal with reality as it really is. We don't skip over these passages because all of God's word is given to us for our help.

[7 : 25] And maybe these passages are particularly important for us. These are sermons that, truth be told, we don't necessarily look forward to hearing when we come to church on a Sunday.

And yet here we are. David and Bathsheba. You know, there are moments in stories that are so surprising and so shocking that once the twist has come, you can't see the story or experience the story in the same way if you are to relive it.

Have you seen the Russell Crowe film, A Beautiful Mind? It's a little bit old now, but John Nash is a brilliant mathematician. And he picks up a secret role working for the US Department of Defense, seeking to combat the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War.

And as his job becomes more and more conspiratorial and more secretive, as it controls him more and more, the film reveals that it's all a figment of his imagination.

He has schizophrenia. And so what was assumed before the twist and what we experienced in the story before the twist is now no longer the case.

[8 : 52] And it was never the case. His boss, his projects, were all fictional. And for all of our character study of David over the last couple of months, this story has loomed over the series like an impending storm cloud, if you're at all familiar with David's life story.

Once you know this story of 2 Samuel 11 and 12, you cannot think of David in the same wholly positive light that the story to this point would lead you to.

Because up until this point, David appears to be the ultimate king that Israel has yearned for. But this story means that cannot be the case.

And so therefore, has never been the case. It's a story of sexual misconduct. It's a story of murder.

It's a story of a gross misuse and abuse of power. And sadly, this is a story of life in our world.

[10 : 12] Where selfish people take from us. Where people we thought we could trust use us for themselves.

My job is to show you from this passage that despite the brokenness, despite the sin in our world, there is a God who gives.

Who we can turn to. So shall we pray to him? Heavenly Father, we know that you are good.

And we know that you are love. Our passage is so devastatingly sad. And this on top of other news this morning that is so difficult to hear.

Would you help us this morning to see clearly? Help us to turn to you with our questions and our uncertainties. Help us trust you with our questions and our uncertainties.

[11 : 27] Be gentle with us as we seek to put one foot in front of the other and live for Jesus in this world. For his sake we pray.

Amen. Our first point for this morning is going to focus on chapter 11 and the heading that I've given it is simply David Takes.

It's in the outline but keep your Bibles open. Verse 1 of 2 Samuel 11. In the spring at the time when kings go off to war David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army.

They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. Now there are hints right from the outset here that David is not going to be the hero of this story.

Kings are supposed to be off at war. Well, verse 1 tells us that David's not. He has sent out the army to do the king's work while he remained in Jerusalem or literally he sat in Jerusalem.

[12 : 41] Verse 2. One evening David got up from his bed and he walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman washing. The woman was very beautiful.

It's not just that David was sitting in Jerusalem but to get up from his bed at the end of the day is to suggest that he's been lying down.

He's been sleeping during the day. Throughout the Bible the Christian life is one that walks in step with the Spirit. It follows Jesus.

To sit and to be idle is a symbol of spiritual lethargy. Sin creeps in when you aren't actively following Jesus.

And in this state David notices Bathsheba except he doesn't know her name despite the fact that she is a reasonably close neighbour of his.

[13 : 49] He is ignorant of her until this point. In case you're wondering there's nothing immodest or immoral about her behaviour here. We're about to find out that she has recently had her period and so she is seeking to remain ceremonially clean in accordance with the law that God gave in Leviticus.

And what is emphasised though is that David views her from the roof. He is high up. She is low down. She is seeking holiness.

He is spiritually lethargic. She is entitled to privacy but there is nowhere she can go to escape the lustful gaze of the king.

And in his spiritual lethargy rather than fighting temptation he will be a slave to his desires. Verse 3 And David sent someone to find out about her.

The man said she is Bathsheba the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Then David sent messengers to get her.

[15 : 08] This is a passage of sending and taking. David sent the army to war he sends someone to find out about who this woman is and now he sends messengers.

There's a little wordplay going on here in the original and the Hebrew word for kings is Melachim. That's what David's supposed to be.

That's what his title says he is. The Hebrew word for David sending messengers is Malachim. It is instead of being a Melachim at war that David is sending Malachim to get this woman.

What's the point of the play on words? David is not acting as the king. he is negligent and he's improper.

Instead of being a king David is sitting in his palace sending people to run errands for him and the errand here is to get Bathsheba or literally to take her. What did Adam and Eve do in the garden?

[16 : 24] They saw the fruit. They desired the fruit. They took the fruit. And here David reveals himself to be a son of Adam.

You know when Israel asked for a king back in 1 Samuel Samuel had warned them that a king like the nations would be a king who takes.

The kings like the nations will take for themselves the people's sons and put them into the army, into the workforce, put them at risk. The kings like the nations will take the daughters of the nation and turn them into household servants.

The king like the nations will take livestock and everything else. But this with Bathsheba is a level of taking that not even the kings of the nations were doing.

It was worse than what Samuel had warned Israel of. The sequence of events is brutally swift. It's all in verse 4. David takes her by the messengers.

[17 : 40] She came to him. He slept with her. She went back home. Because it's so quick, there are lots of things that we don't know.

We don't know how much conversation is had. We haven't heard her speak yet. That isn't because the Bible doesn't value her, but it's because it's trying to show us that David doesn't really value her.

This is a chapter that focuses on David's sin and the implications of that. Another thing we don't know, we don't know how many people know about this. There are at least a few, the messengers who were sent.

We don't know how consensual it was, though there is a huge power differential. If Mephibosheth couldn't say no to being summoned by the king last week, Bathsheba could hardly say no now.

But crucially, there is one thing we do know. When in verse 5, Bathsheba speaks her only words for the chapter, I am pregnant, we know it can't be Uriah's baby.

[19 : 00] For at the moment of David's encounter with her, we're told that she has just had her period. And so, the scrambling begins. David is now the military general for his own cover-up.

He sends for Uriah to come home in the hope that he will sleep with Bathsheba and this will be covered over. But Uriah is more honourable than David.

Verse 11, how could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing. Uriah is loyal to his brothers on the front line.

So David gets him drunk and sends him home again but Uriah retains his principles. So David organises a hit. He sends Uriah to Joab carrying instructions for his own murder.

Joab arranges the hit and he tries to conceal David's motive when he sends report back. He says to the messenger, if David asks you this, then say that.

[20 : 08] But the messenger has worked out what David really wants to know. Verse 23. The messenger said to David, the men overpowered us and came out against us in the open but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate.

Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead. And that's what David wanted to hear.

He's happy. Cover up complete. Bathsheba mourns Uriah's death.

The picture by the time we get to verse 26 is that Uriah is dead. Bathsheba is mourning and pregnant. Joab knows the king is a disgrace.

The messengers! The messengers know that the king is a disgrace. We, as the reader, know that the king is a disgrace. But David thinks he's going to get away with it. Because he has successfully abused the power of his position as king.

[21 : 24] You know, I've heard from spouses who have discovered that their partner has been having an affair, that when that happens it is completely disorienting.

Because the way that you thought things were are now revealed to be false. You thought you were a family, but it has been shown that you are not.

You thought you were living a life together, but it has been shown that you are not. you thought you were being honest with each other, but it has been shown that you were not.

And you built your life on these things. These were foundations for everything, and now they're gone. The rug is pulled out from under you, and you don't know what way is up and what way is down, and you don't know what is right and what is wrong, and you don't know who you can trust.

David's sin has that impact for the whole nation. So tightly was the king wrapped up in their understanding of God's blessing to them, or curse to them, that for the good king to fall like this, was a spiritual crisis for Israel.

[22 : 48] Their sense of identity as a nation is completely torn to shreds. this is the impact of David's sin.

Given what we've just walked through in that chapter, and that Israel is a basket case of a nation because of David's actions, I don't want to assume that those of us who hear this and walk through this in this room now are just okay with that.

you might identify somewhat with Bathsheba, or you might know someone closely who would. You might identify with David to some extent and want to repent.

You might not identify with either, but you just feel heavily the reality of sin in our world. one of the resources which God has given his people in this broken world is lament.

There are a number of the Psalms which are devoted to helping God's people pour out their hearts to God. Lament is the thing that we're encouraged to do when we don't know what to do.

[24 : 11] The most important part of lament is that you're honest with God. with what you're feeling. So I want to just provide 20 seconds of silence for you to pray.

Whatever you want to pray. And then I'm going to read some words from Psalm 13 and we'll move on to our second point. Take a moment. from Psalm 13.

How long Lord will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

Lord we trust in your unfailing love. Hear our prayers. In Jesus name. Amen.

Having looked at David taking, our second point is that God confronts. Chapter 11 finishes with David and Bathsheba getting married.

[25 : 35] after the time of mourning we're told which could be as little as seven days. So there have been let's say six weeks passed by before Bathsheba realises she's pregnant.

Then David brings back Uriah, sends him back, organises the hit, hears word. It could be as little as three months between David viewing Bathsheba from the roof and taking her as his wife.

Again we don't know any more than that. We don't know what sort of conversations they did or didn't have about Uriah. We don't know if Bathsheba knows David's role in his death.

We don't know how Bathsheba felt about being his wife. And with so many questions circling, with so little clarity about what people think, about what is right and what is wrong and what is up and what is down, it is a breath of fresh air to hear the last nine words of the chapter.

But the thing, David had done, displeased the Lord. God was watching. He knew what David was up to.

[26 : 46] Way back in Hannah's prayer at the beginning of 1 Samuel, she says, for the Lord is a God who knows and by him deeds are weighed.

And so, chapter 12, verse 1, the Lord sent Nathan to David. David had sent messengers and notes around in chapter 11, now God is stepping in to send word to his king.

Bathsheba had come to David in chapter 11, now Nathan comes to him. David is directing events in chapter 11, God is directing events in chapter 12. God is stepping in to be the king that Israel needs because David is not.

And Nathan tells this story, there's a rich man who's hosting a traveller and instead of giving one of his own animals, of which he has many, for the meal, he takes the only lamb that the poor man has.

And David hears this story and flares up. And we see that he's falling into Nathan's trap. I remember a few years ago I was sitting on the bus and it was a city gridlock in terms of traffic and no one was going anywhere, all the cars were stationary and I looked towards my right, sort of towards the back outside the bus and there was a cyclist who was coming down in the gutter between the last row of cars and the footpath and evidently he could obviously see there was a clear passageway ahead because he had a big smile on his face as he was sort of riding past all the cars in the way that cyclists love going faster than cars just for a moment.

[28 : 33] And so he was sort of doing that heading up towards the front of the traffic and then I turned around and then I saw a pedestrian. There was a woman who was walking through the cars and she was dressed up for work for the day, she had a cup of coffee in one hand, she had a stack of papers under the other arm and she was sort of walking through the stationary traffic and I calculated her speed and how fast she was going and I calculated the speed of the cyclist who was coming through.

I'm on the bus, I can't warn anyone but I know they're going to hit each other. And sure enough as she took the last step out from in front of the car before she got onto the footpath, the cyclist was about at that time aligned with the front tyre of that car and bang, he went over, she went over, coffee everywhere, papers everywhere.

Now they both stood up and brushed themselves off, it didn't seem like anyone was too badly injured but I was in that position of seeing what was going to happen before it happened. Have you ever had that moment? Well that's what we see here.

We see that David is going to fall into Nathan's trap but what is the trap? that David is falling into? What is the thing that Nathan identifies as being the crux of David's sin?

Interestingly, it's not a story about adultery, it's not a story about murder. It's not even really a story about abuse of power.

[30 : 11] It's all of those things for David. But the story is about taking. The rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep, instead he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man.

And when Nathan delivers God's very word to David, verse 10 says, now therefore the sword will never depart from your house because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.

Why is that the main problem? it is the adultery, it is the murder, it is the abuse of power, but why focus on taking?

David's taking is the problem because it is incompatible with God's character towards his people. You see, God is a God who gives.

And so the king over God's people should give as well. In verses 7 and 8, God gives David a list of five things.

[31 : 19] He says, I anointed you, I delivered you, I gave, I gave, I would have given more. And David responds to the giving of God by taking for himself from God's people.

And a king who takes is like the nations, not like God. A king who takes needs to be dealt with by God. David is not the true and final king.

Where will Israel turn in their disillusionment? Where can we turn when the world has taken from us? This is quite a live question at the moment.

You may be aware of this TV series on Netflix, the four-part story, adolescence. And if you're not familiar with it, I won't spoil all of it, but there is really some very, very dark stuff that happens and it's an investigation into working out who has done what and then how those involved who have done it, these teenage boys, are to be handled with.

How is society supposed to respond to something so horrific? And it goes through four episodes and each of them deals with a different institution as it were and none of them can handle it.

[32 : 39] The police can't handle this situation, the school can't handle this situation, the juvenile detention and the therapist there can't handle the situation, the family can't handle this. The question from adolescence is where are we supposed to turn when the world is taken away from us, when we're confronted by evil around us?

Now you may or you may not instinctively think that the Bible has an answer for us, but I want to hold out for you the possibility that the God who confronts David in his sin is the only place you can turn.

When Jesus turns up, he comes not to take, but to give. and he gives everything.

He gives right up to his final breath that flows from his lips on the cross. He is the true king that David wasn't and this side of the cross, where else can you turn when the world has taken from you?

Because if you take your trust, your hope, and your loyalty and you give that to anyone or anything other than Jesus, you're simply turning back to the world in the hope that it has changed.

[34 : 04] But 2 Samuel 11 tells us that the world doesn't change, it always takes from you. And even if you're a success story, even if life is a success, the world is still a world that takes.

The nations around Israel promised much and delivered little. the world around you does the same. There's a woman who's very, very dear to me.

She grew up as a Christian who's not walking with Jesus at the moment. I was chatting to her a couple of years ago. And at the time, she was in her 20s.

She owned multiple properties. She's married to a good husband. She had a full-time job which paid her well. She also had a side hustle as a social media influencer that was effectively a full-time wage.

And in our conversation, it was as if she had nothing. She said to me, I keep telling myself, you can have everything you want, you just can't have it yet.

[35 : 14] You can see, as I can see, she'll never be happy. The world will keep promising much happiness, satisfaction, and while we chase that and hope in that, it will keep taking from us.

It will take our time, it will take our energy, it will take our stress, it will take our health.

if things go bad, it will take far more. But for my friend, it will never give her what she wants.

Where can you turn? Friends, we've got nowhere to turn other than Jesus. When the world takes from us, the only place we can go is the King who gives.

the new and better King that David wasn't, but Jesus is. So wherever you're at this morning, whatever's running through your body, whatever you can feel in your veins, with all of it, turn to Jesus, God's true King, the one who lived and died and lives again to give himself for you.

[36 : 46] let's pray. Heavenly Father, we feel the heaviness of passages like this on days like this. we feel our disillusionment, we feel our uncertainty, we feel questions, we feel our lack of resources to deal with the world.

Would you help us turn to Jesus? would you make us so clear in our minds that he is the only place we can turn, the only place where hope can be found, the only place where life can be restored.

And we pray all of that in his name. Amen. Amen.