

The Chastening of David

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Date: 17 February 2019

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[0 : 00] in the church Bibles. So page 315, that's 2 Samuel chapter 12. The Lord sent Nathan to David.

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 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 traveller 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 traveller 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.

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 what the Lord, the God of Israel, says.

[1 : 20] I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah, and if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.

Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own. This is what the Lord says.

Out of your own household, I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes, I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight.

You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel. Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. Nathan replied, The Lord has taken away your sin.

[2 : 25] You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die. After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck down the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill.

David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. The elders of the household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.

On the seventh day, the child died. David's attendants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, while the child was still living, he wouldn't answer to us when we spoke to him.

How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate. David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized that the child was dead.

Is the child dead? He asked. Yes, they replied. He is dead. Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions, and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped.

[3 : 34] Then he went to his own house, and at his request, they served him food, and he ate. His attendants asked him, Why are you acting in this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat.

He answered, While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live. But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me. Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her.

She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him, and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah. Meanwhile, Joab fought against Rabbab of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel.

Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, I have fought against Rabbab and taken its water supply. Now muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise, I shall take the city and it will be named after me.

[4 : 44] So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbab and attacked and captured it. David took the crown from the king's head and it was placed on his own head. It weighed a talent of gold and it was set with precious stones.

David took a great quantity of plunder from the city and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes. And he made them work at brick making.

David did this to all the Ammonite towns. Then he and his entire army returned to Jerusalem. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray as we sit.

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen. So if we can keep our Bibles open at the passage we've just had read, we'll look at it. It's an exciting passage in some ways.

[5 : 50] It's a very challenging passage. It's a great contrast from chapter 11 which was almost entirely depressing. Chapter 11 was the story of David's great sin, his adultery of Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah.

In chapter 11 the Lord himself is not actually mentioned in the chapter at all except in the final verse when it says that the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

Just that final verse. The rest of it David's getting on with well, getting on with what he shouldn't be getting on with through the rest of the chapter. He was getting, he was doing what he wanted without regard for God.

Now in chapter 12 on the other hand the story begins with the Lord. It says the Lord sent Nathan. In chapter 11 David was doing the sending.

If we track it through we can see that he sent Joab in verse 1 to fight. Then in verse 3 he sent a man to find out about Bathsheba. Then he sent messengers to get her in verse 4.

[7 : 09] In verse 6 he sent word to Joab bring me Uriah the Hittite. And in verse 14 David sent a letter with Uriah.

David's taking the lead but the Lord acts in verse in chapter 12. In chapter 12 the Lord sent Nathan. Now of course we know the end of the story. You've just heard it read and also you probably most of you probably knew it before. so you all know that everything's going to work out well for Nathan. But actually Nathan didn't know that. Nathan had a very challenging task. He had to go and tell the king that he had done wrong and to rebuke him.

That wasn't an easy task because he didn't know how David would react. So Nathan is both courageous and I'm going to say that he was canny.

[8 : 18] I was trying to find a suitable word but I had to begin with C in order to fit my outline which you've got on the sheet. But I think canny is not a bad word. He wanted to make his point without going in with the direct assault on David.

You see he doesn't tell David that he's telling a story. I think that David thinks that actually Nathan is presenting him with a court case that he's got to make a decision.

It's up to him as the king to sort out this difficult situation. So Nathan tells a story about two people. There's a rich man and he's described very briefly.

He had a large number of sheep and cattle. He was rich. That's probably the usual way that people were rich then. And the poor man is described much more beautifully in except one little ewe lamb that 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. There's some interesting echoes of chapter 11

in that description.

[9 : 44] You see the poor man gives. He gives the lamb food and drink and affection. And if you remember back to last week, we can think about what Uriah thought that he would have liked to have given to his wife that night that he was sent by David back to Bathsheba.

He didn't give her food and drink and affection because he said, I'm on active service. How can I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife?

But on normal circumstances, he was going to give to his wife all those things, just as the poor man gave food and drink and affection to the lamb.

The lamb was like a daughter to him. In Hebrew, the lamb was like a daughter, a bat, a bath. Of course, Uriah, his lamb was Bathsheba.

But the rich man, he was quite different. He didn't give, he took. He took the ewe lamb.

[11 : 04] The same verb is actually used in 11 verse 4. It's not there in the English, but is there in the Hebrew. Then David sent messengers to take Bathsheba. In a strict sense, the story that Nathan tells isn't an allegory.

I mean, it's clear that the poor man, the rich man is David, the poor man is Uriah, and the ewe lamb is Bathsheba. But in the story, of course, it's the lamb who dies.

In real life, it's the poor man. But the story is close enough. And so, when Nathan tells the story, he gets David just where he wants him.

David burns with anger to think how. Anyone could do that. There's a person who's got everything, and yet, he takes the one thing from someone else.

The rich man, says David, is a son of death, literally. He had no pity. And then comes those immortal words from Nathan, you, but not points, someone might think, you are the man.

[12 : 33] And then he begins to explain what he means. God gave you kingdoms and wives, anything you wanted. If you wanted more, I would have given you even more.

The only things you went to have were the things that are contrary to God's law. But what did David do? Well, first, before we sort of unpack it, it's just describing three crucial sentences in chapter, in 9, verse 9, verse 9b.

And in each case, it's the object that comes first. Uriah the Hittite, you struck down with the sword. His wife you took to be your own.

Him you killed with the sword of the Ammonites. And the Lord says that the consequences of David's terrible sin are appropriate to what David had done.

You have struck down Uriah with the sword, therefore the sword will never depart from your house.

Three of David's sons, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, all died violent deaths.

[13 : 58] As we read on in the story, after David's great sin, nothing's ever the same again. Everything is always different and worse than it had been before.

And then he says, you've taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Therefore, I will take your wives and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight.

As we don't want to think about that in too much detail, but in chapter 16, they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom slept with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

And the thing about chapter 11 is it's a great cover-up. When after the disaster that Bathsheba becomes pregnant, the rest of the chapter is devoted, is David's project as to how he can cover up his sin.

But of course, he didn't manage to cover it up, because God knew. You did it secretly, says God, but I will do this before all Israel.

[15 : 12] But David's sin is described not only in terms of his crimes against Uriah in particular, but it's described in two very similar phrases in verses 9 and 10.

You have despised the word of the Lord. Verse 9, you have despised me. Verse 10, David, who knew the Lord, who had rejoiced to worship him, who'd been a great follower, been a wonderful king, despised the Lord, put his own wishes in front of doing God's will.

Well, David hears this tremendous rebuke, and he gets it.

He comes under conviction of sin, and in verse 13 he says, I have sinned against the Lord. That seems very brief as a confession, doesn't it?

After that tremendous condemnation, he comes very briefly in response. But we know actually that what he actually did soon after was to produce the words that we now know as Psalm 51.

[16:53] Don't look them up now because we're going to say them together later. But I'll read out a few of the verses of that Psalm. And the Psalm is introduced to the words when the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

David said these words, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. turned over two pages and they've stuck together.

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. And so David's confession, brief here, long in Psalm 51, leads to forgiveness of sin.

Nathan replied, The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But that's not the end of what the Lord says to him.

[18:18] But by doing this, because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die. What we learn from this passage is that there are both cleansing and consequences for David.

I think that's the way I probably want to put it. Yes, he comes with confession and he's cleansed. But that's not the complete story.

I'm going to think a bit more about that later. David and Bathsheba's son is struck down.

It's interesting here, I think, to see how people are described. At this point, she's just described, Bathsheba is called Uriah's wife.

The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had born to David. It's a phrase that's also used in the genealogy of our Lord in Matthew's gospel.

[19:30] Bathsheba's not actually mentioned. She's just called Uriah's wife. That's the point. she was Uriah's wife, certainly at this stage.

Although later on, of course, she became David's. It's interesting how much David cares for the child. He had several wives and children. So he turns to prayer and fasting.

He sought God for the first time in ages. The last year he'd been far from God. Now he turns to God. He prays as a child to a parent.

He's heard his heavenly father's decision, but prays that it may be changed. He longs that this child may live. And after all his secrecy, he doesn't conceal what's happening from his servants.

The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he wouldn't eat any food with them. But despite David's passionate prayer, the child dies.

[20:41] And when the child dies, David submits to God's will. And that really confuses the poor servants, because they think that he was this stressed while the child was still alive, that now he might kill himself.

But David gets up, goes to the temple, has food. I think he feels that he's been mourning for seven days.

Now the mourning is at an end. There's nothing more that he can do. He's done what he could, and now he has to move on from that situation, from where he is.

for despite his terrible sin, David is restored. There is comfort for Bathsheba and for David, verse 24.

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. extraordinary extraordinarily in God's restoring plan.

[22:01] This new son is the special one. This new son is Solomon, the great son. He's given a special name by the Lord, Jedidiah.

David not only receives comfort from the Lord, but David enters on a new commitment. It's important to look at the whole structure, so I'd like that on the screen, my one picture, there we are. Here's an outline of chapters 11 and 12. You see, the whole thing goes wrong at the very beginning of chapter 11. It was the time when kings go out to fight, but David didn't go, he just stayed in Jerusalem.

If he'd gone to fight, he wouldn't have been on the roof looking at other men's wives. Then we have the story of adultery of Bathsheba and the child conceived.

Then there's the long description of Uriah's death. Then we have the central bit of the story. We have Nathan and David, Nathan's challenge and David's ultimate conviction of sin.

[23 : 23] Then we have the death of the child. Then David comforts Bathsheba and Solomon is born. And then finally we get to where we should have been at the very beginning because David actually goes up and he fights with Ammon and he wins.

Joab's a good sort in this story isn't he? Joab could actually have done the whole thing on his own and he says if you don't come now king I'm going to get all the credit and they may even name the city after me but I want you to come and be there at the victory.

I mean Joab's already got the city of waters which is he's already got the water supply so he's pretty close to final victory over there over the Ammonites but he wants David to come and finish it off. And David acquires this extraordinary crown. It's a bit difficult to decide exactly how the crown operates when you discover that it says at the bottom that it weighs 34 kilograms which I think the ESV told us that was 75 pounds but I suspect we ought to have it in Troy weight since it's gold which I think is 91 Troy pounds.

I'm a metrologist. But either way it's too heavy to wear without killing yourself. I don't know if you've ever heard those descriptions of the Queen used to wear her crown before the coronation.

[24 : 57] She would practice at bath time with the crown on so that she would be able to wear it on the day. But it weighs a tiny fraction of this enormously heavy crown. The ESV I think translates the passage better and suggests that actually it's only the precious stone that went on David's head not the 34 kilograms of gold.

But anyway that's a bit of a sidetrack. So I want to go back through the story and I want to think about it one more time. Up to now I've thought about it retelling it I hope in a way that has helped you.

It certainly encouraged me. But I want now to think about how it relates to us. So let's think first about Nathan. As I said before we know that he didn't know the end of the story.

I mean criticising the boss often brings you to a sticky end. It's worth thinking about what it means to be a Nathan. We can all be called to be a Nathan but there are some people in this room who are more likely to have that task than others.

It's a particular thing that might happen to Martin. A task of challenging other people. He could be called to challenge one of us. But more difficult this is about challenging the powers that be above one in the hierarchy.

[26 : 23] And that takes courage and in some cases it takes canniness in order to do it well. I always remember this is a pretty weak story really since it's about me.

But I always remember as a young lay reader doing the prayers at a memorial service in St. Margaret's Westminster the House of Commons Church. And I was sent by a canon of Westminster Abbey I think a selection of prayers not a selection a list these are to be the prayers and I looked at them and as an evangelical I didn't feel they were quite some of them weren't quite what I was happy with.

So I and then I sent a letter back saying I need the following changes and he wrote back and said that would be fine.

And when I got there I was placed in a sort of huge gilded throne at the far end to read my prayers. I rather enjoyed my gilded throne but I and but I got but I got them changed.

I was happy. Or a splendid example of canniness is the story of Senator Bennett who I gather was promoting a soil conservation act in 1934.

[27 : 40] This isn't a church story. And he wanted to get his soil conservation act through the Senate in the US. And apparently he looked at the weather forecast and he saw that the following day would be much better for his bill.

he wanted a stormy day when people would be aware of the consequences of soil erosion. And he managed to postpone his bill by one day.

And as they were discussing it there was this great roar of wind and everything and he said that's Kansas blowing by. And he got his act of parliament whatever it's called in the US through.

But the story here is about it's both an encouragement to pray for our leaders in particular that they have courage and if need be canniness.

people are to know what about it. But it's also an encouraging story because God is gracious when Nathan speaks. David does listen and the course of history has changed.

[28 : 53] And on top of that David wasn't unhappy with Nathan. He actually named one of his children Nathan. In fact Jesus' ancestor is the one that's named Nathan.

And when I made my feeble protest about the prayers I was warmly welcomed. Grandly welcomed. Then there's David.

Let's think about him. He's obviously a very powerful example of conviction of sin. He's someone who confesses his sin and he's forgiven or cleansed in order to have a C.

And I think the thing about David is that his experience helps us to know that our sins can be forgiven. If David's sin, horrendous sins could be forgiven, then so can yours and so can mine. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But there is that challenge there, isn't there?

[30 : 02] Even though David's sin was forgiven, that didn't mean that all the temporal consequences of his sin were removed. They were that they remained in his family's life, in the country's life, and in the death of his child.

Now, this is a complicated subject. I mean, when you read the Bible, David's experience and its interpretation are given to us. So, we can use that as an example, and we know that that's the way it was.

When we think of someone else, we need to be very careful about this type of interpretation. And we should be careful when we speak.

It may be quite hard even to interpret our own experience, this side of eternity. But I think the important thing is we know that though sin may be forgiven, its consequences may last a lifetime. We can see that, I suppose, in alcohol or drug misuse. We're forgiven, but the medical effects may persist.

[31 : 18] Gambling may be forgiven, but the economic consequences may affect the rest of our lives. Our past can leave marks on us so that only heaven and the resurrection of the body can fully erase them.

Sanctification isn't the same as glorification. That doesn't mean we can't cry out to God and shouldn't cry out that these marks of consequences of our past aren't removed.

We can pray and we should indeed pray. I feel David was right to pray. He went back to God. He said, please. But God did say no to him.

He calls out of his nightmare as a child to his father. We call on him. We pray to him. We seek his face. He said, we're always cleansed.

And we may have these things changed for us. If we confess, we're always cleansed. The consequences we take to God in prayer.

[32 : 38] It's interesting to note, a bit of a sidetrack perhaps, the thought that David does his mourning before the child dies.

And people found that difficult. Sometimes that can happen to us. My mother died of Alzheimer's. And I think we mourned for over a year really. And then she died just before Christmas.

And we had two small children and they wanted Christmas. And funnily enough, we felt we'd really done our mourning. We'd mourned for so long. And we went off and with our little children we had Christmas just the way they wanted it.

So the story also, not only, there's three things, cleansing, consequences, and comfort. Because at the end of the story we don't just end up with the consequences of his sin.

We do end up with restoration, the new son Solomon, loved, who goes on to be a great king.

[33 : 43] And David himself recommits himself to God. He goes and does the very thing he should have done at the start. And he goes off and fights Ammon. And I guess when we read this story, we remember that David isn't the end of God's purposes.

David is the great king, but great David's greater son, the Lord Jesus, is the true king. He's the one whom Christians will meet with joy in heaven.

And then any of those marks that are left by sin will be removed, will not only be sanctified, but glorified.

and we look forward to that. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Let's pray as we sit.

Lord Jesus, there's much in this passage to challenge the thought that we might be called to be a Nathan.

[35 : 06] We pray particularly for our leaders that you'll make them faithful Nathans, where they have to be. In the moment, we're going to confess our sins using the Psalm 51.

Thank you that you do forgive. Father, we may have things where our lives have been affected by our past sin.

Forgiven, yes. But we cry out to you for your healing and making whole. And we do thank you that you comfort us, you restore us.
So help us tonight to we commit ourselves to your service. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.