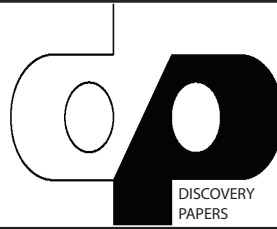


THE REPENTANT KING

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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2 Samuel 12:1-31
29th Message
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2 Samuel 12:1-31

What do you do when the most powerful person in the world abuses their power? How do you confront them? How do you ever hope to break through their defenses and get them to admit what they've done?

This was the problem facing the United States in the early 1970s. Evidence began to appear that the President of the United States had covered up illegal activity related to his re-election campaign. At first, Richard Nixon denied all accusations.

Released in 2008, the film *Frost/Nixon* told the story of the British talk show host David Frost and his television interview with Richard Nixon. In a scene in which Frost confronts Nixon about his activities, Nixon states, "When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal."¹ Frost manages to get this admission from Nixon. This changed everything. Finally, he was able to get the man in power to admit to what he had done.

This morning we are continuing our series in the life of David called *A Life of Passion*. We started working our way through the story of David late last August and we're on track to finish in early June. We've seen David as a shepherd, as a fugitive, as a king, and now as a father.

Throughout his story, there have been many moments where we have looked at David with great admiration. But last week we saw the darkest side of David. We saw him compel a young woman to have sex with him and then order the murder of her husband. At the end of the story, it seemed he might have gotten away with it. Except for the little note that God wasn't happy about what had happened.

This morning we pick up the story in 2 Samuel 12. And we have to be wondering about whether David will really get away with the terrible actions that we witnessed last week. What will God do when the most powerful person in the kingdom has abused their power? And how will David react?

I'm convinced that this story today is one of the main reasons that David is referred to as a man after God's own heart. We have seen his willingness before to be confronted, but today we will see a humility that is remarkable. Especially after what we saw last week. Today we'll meet the repentant king.

This is a pivotal story in David's life. Last week we saw that this king, chosen by God, is capable of darker evil than we would have ever guessed. How can we ever respect him again? How can he ever lead God's people as a faithful king after what he has done? How do you come back from a mistake like that?

When we ask these questions, we immediately realize that we aren't just asking them about David. These are the questions that we ask about the people in our lives. These are the questions that we ask about ourselves.

We are, each one of us, capable of great acts of kindness and love. But we are just as capable of utter selfishness. We can hurt people to get what we want. We can lie about it and make things worse by covering it up. And we can carry our guilt and our shame for years without ever addressing it.

How do we recover from our mistakes? How do we make sense of the terrible thoughts and ideas that go through our heads? How do we get past hurting people in ways that can never be repaired? This is the question that has plagued mankind since that first fateful bite of fruit. How do we find forgiveness?

David's story this morning will help us answer that very question. David will be confronted three times. First by the prophet. Then by God directly. Finally, by the consequences of his action. As the story unfolds, we will see David respond. We'll see David repent.

Watching David will invite us into the same process. Can we be honest about what we've done or wanted to do? Can we repent? Ultimately, can we receive the forgiveness of God?

Last week we saw that the story of David and Bathsheba is a story about power. The key word “sent” was repeated several times as an indication of power. David sent Joab to war. He sent for Bathsheba, took her and lay with her. He sent for Uriah and sent him back to be killed.

But as chapter 12 opens, we find someone more powerful than David doing the sending.

2 Samuel 12:1-4.

And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds, 3 but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. 4 Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

When the God of Israel sees injustice in his people, he sends his prophets to make truth known. One of the roles of a prophet is to call out evil. Nathan realizes that David won’t respond well to simply being challenged, so he devises a strategy to get past David’s defenses. He uses the same technique that Jesus will use one thousand years later. He tells a parable.

The key phrase in this story is in verse 4. The story recounts that the powerful man “was unwilling to take one of his flock.” That phrase is literally translated “he spared his own flock.” He spared his flock, but he “took the poor man’s lamb.” That word for “took” is the same word used to describe David’s taking of Bathsheba.

Read David’s reaction in verses 5-6.

2 Samuel 12:5-6:

Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, 6 and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

That last word, translated “pity”, is the same word as the earlier word “spared.” It’s an intentional contrast. The powerful man had pity on himself, but not on someone less powerful. He has spared himself at the expense of someone else. This is the nature of injustice: powerful people sparing themselves slight inconvenience at the cost of others’ great suffering.

David sees this injustice and it makes him angry. When we see this, it makes us angry too. When we hear of Western men paying young girls for sex in Thailand, we ought to be angry. When we hear about bonded labor in India, we ought to be angry. When we hear about child soldiers in Africa, we ought to be angry. We can’t stand terrible stories of injustice.

We might wonder why this happens so often. What makes those in power blind to the suffering that they cause?

A group of psychologists at leading universities have performed a number of studies of how coming into power can change people. One of their conclusions was that “one of the main problems with authority is that it makes us less sympathetic to the concerns and emotions of others.”²

When you have power, it’s hard to see what others are feeling and suffering. You are intimately aware of your own needs. You mostly have the power to take care of yourself. But you become blind to the needs of others. You spare yourself while causing suffering around you.

Nathan has gotten David angry at this situation. So angry, in fact, that David insists this man be subject not only to the Law’s demand for fourfold restitution, but that he be killed as well. The trap has been set. Nathan springs it in the first part of verse 7.

2 Samuel 12:7a:

Nathan said to David, “You are the man!”

David has been caught. The righteous anger that he felt at the injustice out there has all of a sudden been pointed within. He is the man. Nathan has done his king a great service. He has invited David to look within his heart and to see his effect on other people.

The same dynamic that makes it easier for those in power to become blind to the needs of others also makes it hard for them to see the effects of their blindness. People just don’t fully realize the effects of their actions. It’s easy to stir up righteous anger for the injustice around us. What about the injustice within us?

I know how I feel right now. I know what it feels like to preach a sermon at PBC. But I have no idea what it feels like to listen to me preach a sermon at PBC. I know what it's like to be me. But I don't know what it's like to be married to me or to have me as a friend or a father.

This is our basic problem. We can't tell how we affect other people. We just don't know.

If only there were a way for me to find out how my actions affected you. If only I could see the world from your perspective. Well, it turns out there is. This is what Nathan does for David. He tells him. Nathan shows David what it's like to have him as king.

It's really quite simple. You can cross this chasm by listening to the people around you. Can you listen to people when they tell you about the effects of your actions? Can you listen?

It's hard to listen. If you don't think so, just watch a presidential debate and try to find a single person listening to someone else.

I've shared before about the difficult period that my wife and I experienced in our marriage. There were different issues that were going on between us, but one of them was my addiction to pornography that I had never fully dealt with. Part of it was that I had an incredibly hard time listening to my wife tell me the affect those actions had on her.

I didn't want to face how serious my addiction was. I didn't want it to be a big deal. I thought my wife was overreacting. Doesn't she know how common it is? Doesn't she know how difficult it is to stop? I knew so well the power it held over me, I just couldn't hear about the pain that it caused her.

Do you have a hard time listening to the people in your life? Perhaps you need to hear Nathan's words. You are the man. You are the woman. Your sin is worse than you think. Our hearts are darker than we want to admit. You have hurt people. You can be hard to live with. You don't get it. Stop and listen to the people in your life.

It may feel like they are attacking you, but in reality, they are offering you the one thing you can never have on your own: an outside perspective. It's an act of love. If they hated you, they'd walk away. That's much easier. If they are willing to talk, then you need to be willing to listen.

Can you listen? Can you listen to the voice of others?

Confronted by God

Nathan has drawn David in. He has invited him to see the truth about himself. But before David has a chance to respond, there is a second round of confrontation. Now God speaks directly to David.

2 Samuel 12:7b-12:

Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. 8 And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. 9 Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'"

God follows a typical pattern in how he challenges David. He begins by describing how God treated him: "I anointed ... I delivered ... I gave ... I gave ... and I would have added more." God treated David well. But David didn't respond in kind. David "despised ... did what was evil ... struck down ... took ... and killed."

God gave. David took. God delivered. David struck down. God was good to David. David was evil in return.

There are consequences when you treat people this way. This is what God describes to David. The sword doesn't depart David's house until the fourfold punishment that David insisted upon will be carried out. The lives of four of his children are destroyed by violence. Evil arises out of his own house when two of his sons try to steal the throne from him. And his wives will play a major role in the subsequent stories of rebellion and destruction.

This is what follows sin: death, failure, and broken relationships. It's true in a general sense. But now David has to face the specific consequences of his actions.

Nathan has given David a perspective on what he is really like. God has shown him the damage that his actions will cause. How will he respond? Will he listen? We find out in the beginning of verse 13.

2 Samuel 12:13:a

David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

At this point in the story we breathe a sigh of relief. It worked. Nathan and God have gotten through to David. His eyes have been opened. He has accepted the invitation into repentance.

This is what finally happened to me through marriage counseling. Having another person in the room gave me the chance to just listen. When my wife would talk to our counselor about how she was feeling or what effect my actions had on her, it was completely different from when she would tell me those things. If it was just the two of us, I'd get defensive and explain myself. I was too insecure and proud to listen to her.

But hearing her talk to our counselor forced me to listen. I saw how he reacted to her. How he accepted her descriptions without explanation. I learned to listen. I saw the consequences of my actions and instead of getting defensive, I actually felt sad for the pain that my choices caused.

That's repentance. Recognizing the wrong and grieving the pain that you've caused.

God works through the people in our lives to show us difficult truths about ourselves. He reveals our brokenness directly through his Word. We see it around us when we have to face the consequences of our choices. All of this is an invitation. It feels so scary to accept it. It feels like death. And it is, in a way. Repentance is a bit like dying to who we were. Can you do that? Can you repent?

I wanted to find a great example from our culture of someone repenting and realizing the depth of their sin. I looked around and asked several people. But I just couldn't think of one. Real repentance is rare. Our instinct is always to defend, deny, or explain.

But there are always opportunities. Ironically, I've found that when men struggle with pornography, it can create a unique opportunity for repentance. I'll often talk to men who say that everything in their life is great. They feel kind and generous and respectful and mature in most other areas. Except they look at porn.

What I've found is that their pornography habit can be a doorway into the rest of their heart. They probably aren't doing as well as they think in those other areas of life. They just don't see it. But if they are willing to do the hard work of recovery from porn, they start to see their self-righteousness, their anger, their entitlement, their loneliness, and their pain.

That's the good news about repentance. Our heart is one big interconnected tangle. As you face your sin and own it and repent for it, you develop softness. A willingness to see yourself as you are and to accept responsibility. It's the opposite of what the Bible calls "hardness of heart." It's humility. Perhaps it is what made David a man after God's own heart.

So what about you? Can you repent? The goal isn't to sit here in church and try to conjure up a really deep sense of being sorry. It's not a matter of how much you feel it. It's not about really meaning it when you say that you have sinned against the LORD. It's about what comes next. How do you walk away from here?

Confronted by Circumstances

For David, that process starts immediately. As soon as he's confronted by his sin and as soon as he responds, the process of healing begins.

2 Samuel 12:13b-15a:

And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 14 Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.” 15 Then Nathan went to his house.

The abruptness of this part of the story is shocking. It took twelve verses for Nathan to tell his parable, for David to react and for God to add his words to Nathan's rebuke. But then in rapid succession, David owns his mistake and immediately Nathan declares the forgiveness of God.

How can the forgiveness of God be so easily granted? Is that really all it takes? Does repentance lead so quickly to forgiveness? Yes. That's what makes this story so beautiful. Repentance is not easy. But when you find it, forgiveness comes immediately.

Notice that the forgiveness doesn't mean David gets away with anything. God doesn't remove all the consequences of his sin. David does everything in his power to beg God to spare the life of his child. But it didn't work. This would not be the last consequence of David's sin. But it would be the most obvious.

We might ask how this is fair. Why should the child die because of David's sin? How is that a fair punishment?

It isn't. This isn't fair. But that is the reality of sin. Sin doesn't deal fairly. Sin consumes without prejudice and without concern for what makes sense. Sin destroys. My actions hurt other people. Sometimes, maybe even most of the time, it's the people around me that have to experience the consequences of my mistakes.

Now, please don't think that a tragedy that you've experienced is God punishing you for your sin. There are isolated incidents in the Old and New Testament where God makes that point. But biblically speaking, this kind of a direct correlation is far and away the exception rather than the rule.

But sin always has consequences. Our world is broken and it hurts. We repent and we are forgiven, but life is still hard. Where do we go from there? How do we get up the next morning and get out of bed?

David was confronted by the truth. He repented of his sin. He faced the consequences of his actions. But then, amazingly, he moves on.

2 Samuel 12:20-25:

Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." 22 He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' 23 But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

24 Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon.

And the Lord loved him 25 and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.

It's incredible that David would allow the rebuke from Nathan and the Lord to reach his heart. It's incredible that David would repent in the way he did. But the most incredible part of this story is how he moves on from this situation so quickly.

In fact, it's a little bit odd. Maybe even impolite. Aren't you supposed to mourn the death of your child? But the language, at least for David, is reminiscent of a resurrection. "He arose ... he washed ... he anointed ... he changed ... he worshiped ... he ate ... he comforted ... he lay with ... he bore a son ... he called his name Solomon."

Out of the death of his repentance has come the new life of a future. A baby has been born who has two names. One means "peace," the other means "beloved." The next chapter of this story is already beginning. Out of his sin, out of his repentance, out of his forgiveness comes life. A future.

The central message of Christianity is forgiveness. This is what the death of Jesus on the cross accomplished for us. It's what we often boil the whole Gospel down to: "Your sins are forgiven."

So why are Christians some of the guiltiest people I know? Why do so many people go to bed at night feeling like a failure? Why do we think that someone else is doing this whole God thing far better than we? Why are we haunted by our past mistakes and terrified of making new ones?

You need to listen. You need to repent. But once you've done that, you need to do what might be the hardest part of the whole process. You need to move forward. You need to receive the forgiveness of God. Can you receive forgiveness?

Sometimes Christians don't take sin seriously enough. We think that we can get away with it. We think that no one is watching. We need the people in our lives and the Word of God to help us see the severity of our sin.

But in my experience, it is just as common for Christians to take sin too seriously. Once you've entered into a relationship with Jesus, sin is paid for. We aren't ruled by sin. We have a new master. Sin has been defeated. The power of sin has been broken. That means

that we don't have to beat ourselves up. We don't have to walk around feeling bad about ourselves. We don't have to feel like we are a constant disappointment.

Nathan comes to David and tells him, "You are the man." God comes to us and tells you and I, "You are the man." But then Jesus the Christ, the son of David, stands before Pontius Pilate as he says to the crowd in John 19:5, "Behold the man." David was the sinful man. We are the sinful men and women. But then Jesus takes the place of the sinful man and woman.

And we are given forgiveness.

Sin is ten times uglier than we think. But forgiveness is infinitely more beautiful than we imagine. Can you receive it?

Maybe part of the problem is that we don't really want to be forgiven. When I was struggling with pornography, I didn't want forgiveness. I wanted my wife to look at me and tell me it was no big deal. I wanted it to be true that she was overreacting. I wanted it not to be my fault. I want to just be okay.

But I'm not okay. I'm broken and sinful and selfish in ways that you'd find shocking if your heart wasn't just as dark. We aren't offered reassurance and a pat on the back. We are offered forgiveness.

Next time someone bumps into you and says "I'm sorry," look them in the eye and say, "I forgive you." It will completely freak them out. They didn't really do anything wrong. They weren't really asking for forgiveness.

It's an incredible thing to receive forgiveness from a person that you've hurt. You can't demand it. You don't deserve it. It's simply a gift. To receive that kind of forgiveness. It's a miracle. And it frees you up to live a completely different kind of life.

Please stop carrying your guilt and shame. Please let go of your failures. Embrace the freedom of life that Christ offers. Receive his forgiveness—not just on a surface level. Live in that freedom.

Conclusion

We started off this morning by watching the dramatized version of an interview with Richard Nixon. These interviews exposed the truth of how this man thought about his power. The first, and as yet only, President of the United States to resign from office. His reputation was tarnished. But he fought back. He tried to rebuild his life. When he died twenty years later, it was as a somewhat grudgingly respected elder statesman.

We're going to see how David recovers from his sin. He has demonstrated a remarkable repentance. He seems to have received God's forgiveness. But as the story continues, it will seem like he never really recovers from this story at all. We'll start to wonder whether he really did receive forgiveness. David will never be the same.

Honestly, it will be discouraging to see the extent to which David's sin tarnishes his life. But it helps to remember what the story of David is really about. David's story isn't about him. It's about the one who comes in his place. David couldn't fully recover from his sin, but then the son of David came to take away the sin of the world.

David's story is really about Jesus. The story of the world is the story of Jesus. And so the story of David is helpful, not because we can follow in David's footsteps, but because he leads us to Christ.

We overestimate ourselves. We are not as good as we think. But we underestimate the depth of forgiveness that is offered to us because of Christ.

Be broken. Face your sin. Repent. Receive the forgiveness of Jesus. Be free and move forward.

Endnotes

¹ *Frost/Nixon*. Dir. Ron Howard. Perf. Frank Langella, Michael Sheen, and Kevin Bacon. Imagine Entertainment, Working Title Films, StudioCanal, 2008. Film.

² "The Power Trip." *Jonah Lehrer*. The Wall Street Journal.com. Web. 14 August 2010. <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704407804575425561952689390>>.