

“Beware of Nude Bathers in the Courtyard Below!”

August 22, 2010

**Psalm 51
2 Samuel 11**

**A Sermon preached by
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Now, when last we left our hero David, he had become king of Israel...God’s representative on earth. He had, over the course of the years, distinguished himself as a faithful shepherd...a slayer of giants...a valiant warrior...a composer of psalms...and a leader of his people. And now, as king of Israel, had established himself and his nation as a powerful forces in the middle eastern world. From Egypt to the south and the Euphrates River to the north, Israel’s size under David’s leadership had expanded nearly eight times over. Nations which had once been Israel’s bitter enemies, now paid tribute to Israel’s king. And in the process, the entire nation of Israel prospered. Clearly God had blessed both David...AND his nation – all because, the scripture tells us, *“David was a man after God’s own heart.”*

But there came a time in David’s life when all of that wasn’t enough...when he wasn’t SATISFIED with power and wealth and fortune and fame...when mighty nation and high position left him wanting...when eight wives and countless concubines and a life of luxury and leisure which anyone in the realm would have envied failed to meet his innermost longing. David wanted MORE. He wanted what belonged to someone else. And as a result, even this *“man after God’s own heart”*...this man who *“walked in the way of the Lord”*...fell into a period of sinfulness, deceit and murder...the result of which hung like a dark cloud over not only David’s life, but the life of his family and indeed over the entire nation of Israel for many years to come.

The story is told in the 11th Chapter of 2nd Samuel...and believe you me, it is NOT a “pretty” story. But then, that’s the way the Bible OFTEN is, isn’t it...painting portraits of its heroes lives that are honest and realistic -- warts and all. But then, maybe that’s so that we can see something of OURSELVES mirrored in their lives. Which is certainly the case with DAVID’S story. For if this person...this *“man after God’s own heart”* can stumble and fall, then perhaps we can gain a little better understanding of how WE, with OUR feet of clay, can ALSO mess up, even as we too try to walk in the way of the Lord.

The story, of course, is the story of David and Bathsheba and here’s how it goes. It was the time of the year, the scriptures tell us, when kings go out to battle. But David did NOT go out to battle. Instead, he stayed home in Jerusalem and sent his general, Joab, to fight the Ammonites – the one neighboring nation that had not yet fallen to Israel’s power and might. Now, who knows why David didn’t go to war. Maybe he had the flu or something. Maybe he’d grown tired of these constant battles with neighboring nations. Maybe there were affairs of state that required his attention. Maybe he was having his carpets shampooed. I don’t know. Or maybe he just wanted to enjoy the beautiful spring weather in Jerusalem. After all, the rainy season was over...the warm breezes were blowing, the almond trees were blooming and the sweet smell of wisteria filled the air.

Of course now, had he been where he was SUPPOSED to be...with his troops...none of this would have ever happened. But as it was, it was late afternoon and David had just awoken from his afternoon nap following his mid-day meal. Too much food and too much wine had apparently

done him in. Pushing back the sheets, he stretched, yawned a couple of times, sighed and looked around the room...trying to get up the energy to get out of bed. But he was tired. Oh, he certainly didn't need to sleep any longer. He wasn't tired from exertion or the challenging life he was living. Far from it! He was simply tired from boredom.

Getting up from his bed, he stepped out onto his rooftop terrace into the warm springtime sunshine. Eastern monarchs, you see, frequently built their bedchambers on the second or third story the palace and had a door that opened onto what we might call a rooftop garden. Often it was elegantly furnished...an oasis...a place to sit with his family or advisors in the evening above the rabble and noise of the street below.

Strolling among the redbud, the pomegranates, the roses and the oleanders, David gradually became aware of the sounds of splashing coming from the courtyard of a neighbor's house below. Perhaps there was a soft singing that attracted his attention as well.

As David looked to see what was going on, the glint of sunlight reflecting off water caught his eye. And immediately he noticed a woman bathing...a very BEAUTIFUL woman bathing...naked.

Now, you need to know that when the Bible says someone is beautiful, she's VERY beautiful. And when the record says she's VERY beautiful, she's a knock-out...physically attractive beyond description. Rarely does the Scripture include the word "very," and when it does, rest assured, it is NOT an exaggeration.

As David stood there on the roof of the palace in the warmth of the late afternoon sunshine...with no one else around...he suddenly lost all cognizance of who he was or what would happen if he fell into sin. His heart beat faster and harder than it had in years. He was, after all, a man of passion and desire...including, it seems, an insatiable desire for beautiful women. And whatever David wanted, David was accustomed to getting. He was, after all, THE KING! He had already married eight other women and had countless liaisons with numerous concubines which had yielded him a total of some twenty sons and one daughter. And yet, though he had an entire household of women to choose from, his smoldering desire for THIS woman burst into flame and he knew he HAD to have her. And in that very moment, the God, whose heart David had so often sought, suddenly became distant and unreal to David. Passion became his god and before that god, David worshiped and bowed down. Blinded by desire and hardly able to control himself, David called for his servant and inquired who the woman was. And listen to what the servant said, because it is so VERY important!

"She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite," came the servant's reply.

Now, I find that statement incredibly significant. From the mouth of David's lowly servant came a warning of great importance. Normally in Israel, a person's identity was given without regards to their spouse. The person's FATHER...or GRANDfather...or sometimes even GREAT grandfather might be named. But NEVER a spouse. But here this servant says to David, *"She is Bathsheba, Eliam's daughter, URIAH'S wife."* In other words, *"The lady's MARRIED, for heaven's sake David."* Because, you see, I'm convinced that servant knew EXACTLY what David was thinking. He wasn't blind. He could SEE that was naked. He could SEE that she was beautiful. And he KNEW his master. And I don't have a doubt in the world that God was using that servant to say to David: *"Watch out, buddy! This is dangerous territory here!"*

But that didn't even seem to register with David. It went completely over his head. Remember, it was not his head that was ruling David at that moment. It was his LUST. Out of control, he said NO to all the things he should have said YES to...and YES to all thing things he should have said NO to. His desire for the naked bather in the courtyard below became all consuming. Moving quickly, without regard for the consequences, David sent his messengers to get her. And they brought her to him...and...well...you know the rest of the story.

Except, of course, that that's NOT the end of the story...not by a long shot. After David had taken what he wanted and had rolled over and fallen asleep again, Bathsheba left the king's palace and returned to her own home. David didn't see her again. He never sent for her...and when he went to his roof-top terrace to watch her bathing in the courtyard below, the courtyard was always empty. But for whatever joy or pleasure the brief encounter may have given David, that joy or

pleasure was soon turned to anguish and turmoil when several months later Bathsheba sent word saying, *"I'm pregnant!"*

But then, that's the way it is with temptation, isn't it? It always shows you the beauty, the ecstasy, the fun, the excitement...the stimulating adventure of satisfied desires. But it never tells you the consequences. It never tells the heavy drinker, *"You'll be sorry in the morning!"* It never tells the drug user, *"This is the beginning of a dead-end road for you buddy!"* It never tells the speed-loving driver, *"Watch out, there's a sharp curve in the road ahead and if you don't slow down you're going to crash!"* And it certainly never tells the adulterer, *"There could be hell to pay for this one night of momentary pleasure!"* No, the truth of the matter is that temptation for momentary pleasure NEVER shows you the consequences until it is FAR too late to avoid them.

And now David was faced with a pregnant Bathsheba. He could take one of two courses. He could fess up...admit his mistake...confess his sin before the Lord...before Bathsheba...AND before her husband, Uriah – which, of course, is what he SHOULD have done – OR he could go the route of cover up and deception...which, of course, is what he DID do – all of which led him further into sin – including going so far as to arrange for the virtual MURDER of an innocent man. And what's more, his choice to lie and deceive set in motion an endless series of headaches and heartaches, the consequences of which plagued his family and his nation for many years to come.

Even as control was slipping through David's fingers like water through a sieve, he quickly hatched a plan to salvage the situation...a crude attempt to rid himself of responsibility by duping Bathsheba's poor husband.

"So David sent word to Joab, the commander of his army, 'Send me Uriah, the Hittite.'"

David's plan, you see, was to bring Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, home for a little R & R, so to speak (wink! wink!) – a little food...a little wine...a little fun and games with his wife in whose bed and in whose arms he had not slept in months. And then, when it was discovered that Bathsheba was pregnant, WHY! who would ever suspect that anyone other than Uriah was the father of her child. What David hadn't counted on in his twisted thinking, however, was the strong moral character and high sense of duty of Uriah, who was straight as an arrow and moral to a fault! You see, Uriah, being the upright man that he was, refused to go home and enjoy the comforts of his wife's bed while his fellow soldiers were fighting on the battle front. And even after David wined and dined him and got him drunk in the hope that he might go home to the feminine charms of his beautiful wife, Uriah STILL insisted on sleeping curled up on the palace floor while Bathsheba bedded down alone. And when THAT happened, the situation suddenly went from bad to worse for David.

So here's the panic-stricken king, frustrated to the point of rage over his failing plan. No matter what he did, he couldn't pull off his plan of deception. He could steal the man's wife...but he couldn't manipulate the woman's husband. Unwitting Uriah would simply NOT cooperate. So David, in an even greater panic, escalated his plan to the next level.

The next morning, David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah as he returned to the battlefield. "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is the fiercest, and then retreat and let him be killed."

To be sure, David had now sunk to his lowest in his effort to cover up what he had done. Not only did he condemn an innocent man to death...in effect murdering him under the guise of battle...but he was even callous enough to send the innocent, trusting, unsuspecting Uriah to his death carrying his own death warrant. Remember the old adage: *"Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive."* Well, there you go!

And so Uriah died...all because David let his passion and desire get the better of him and took something that wasn't his...which, I'm convinced he knew all along was wrong, or else he wouldn't have tried to cover it up in the first place. But it wasn't just Uriah who fell that day on the field of battle. Other soldiers died as well. And perhaps more than anyone, DAVID fell that day...and mighty was his fall.

Now, I want to ask you something. It may sound simple at first...but it's not. So think about it! Why in the world did David have Uriah killed? What did he gain by it? I mean, really! If Uriah had lived and come home from battle and found his wife pregnant, who would have ever connected it to David? Would his servants have told? I don't think so. Would Bathsheba have told

her husband what David had done? Who knows?! But even if Uriah HAD found out, what was he going to do? David was the KING, for heaven's sake. And Uriah was completely loyal to David even if David was anything BUT loyal to Uriah.

And then, after Uriah was killed and after Bathsheba had had her time of mourning, David immediately took her into the palace and made her his wife. Now, it's been my observation that most adults can count to nine and figure out that Bathsheba wasn't married to David when the child was conceived. So why in the WORLD was David doing all this murderous scheming to cover up what he had done? Who in the WORLD did he think he was hiding it all from?

Well, do you remember the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they had eaten the fruit from the forbidden tree and they suddenly realized they were naked and were afraid so they hid? Who were THEY hiding from? Well, they were hiding from GOD. And that's exactly what DAVID was trying to do as well – trying to hide his sinful deed from the Lord, for he KNEW that he had done wrong...knew in the same empirical way we ALL have of knowing, in our heart of hearts, when we have done wrong.

Meanwhile, the end of this awful, tragic episode comes in the stark, but simple words recorded in the last verse of the 11th chapter of 2 Samuel:

“But the Lord was not pleased with David, for David had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

In that brief statement, we see the raw, open sewage which David's life had become. The only man in the Bible to EVER be called “*a man after God's own heart*” was now living a lie, faking his existence in a minor key. This passionate, handsome king...this slayer of giants...this exemplary leader...this singer of psalms now lived in the shadows of his own sinfulness...his life having become something it was never destined to be...all because he compromised what he knew to be right, and then deliberately tried to cover his wrong with an downward spiral of deceit and sinfulness.

Now this story, to be sure, will strike a lot closer to home for some than for others. Some folks, of course, like David, live in the relentless rage of their passions. They may curse them, but those passions are still there. They may hate them, but those passions won't go away. Their passions are like venomous cobras which weave back and forth, lulling their victims into trances and then, when their resistance is down, they bite them, paralyzing them spiritually so they can no longer walk in the way of the Lord. Which is precisely what happened to David. And I think the scriptures tell us these sordid details of David's tragic fall so that we can clearly see where it all leads and what its consequences are.

Have you kept count of David's sins? Lust, adultery, deceit, murder! And you might wonder how a man of David's character...ESPECIALLY “*a man after God's own heart*”...could fall to such a level. But, if you're truly honest about your own heart, it's not too difficult to understand – at least it's not for me. As the old saying goes: “*There but by the grace of God go I.*”

Oh sure! Everybody's doing it! Everybody's got faults! (Notice we don't call them “sins” anymore...only faults.) But just because everybody's doing it doesn't make it right, now does it...ESPECIALLY in the eyes of the Lord!

And so, this sad, dark chapter of David's life comes to an end. Or DOES it? No, not really. The consequences of David's sin would be played out for years and years to come. And in the mean time, David had to live in the misery that sin brings...the very WORST of which is being separated from God...alone...so far away from the Lord.

No, the story doesn't end here. Not until many months had dragged on. Not until a knock came on the palace door...and a friend who cared enough to confront...looked the king in the eye and called a spade a spade.

But that's still come. Suffice it to say, it was a visit David would never forget!

Drawn from and credit given to the following sources for ideas and passages used in this sermon:

1. David: A Man of Passion and Destiny, Charles Swindol
2. “When Kings Go Forth” by Errol G. Smith, p[pp. 69-74, Pulpit Digest, September/October 1996
3. “Sex, Power and Politics” by William Willimon, pp. 29-35, Pulpit Digest, September/October 1995
4. Articles on Bathsheba, Uriah and Nathan in Peculiar Treasures by Fredrick Buechner

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