

The Life of David

Long Live the King

Study 12 | 2 Samuel 11:1-27

“The Sin of the King”

News and Needs

Upcoming Events:

“The story of David and Bathsheba and its immediate aftermath, are the great turning point of the whole David story. . . and it seems as though the writer has pulled out all the stops of his remarkable narrative art in order to achieve brilliant realization of this crucially pivotal episode. The deployment of thematic key words, the shifting play of dialogue, the intricate relation between instructions and their execution, the cultivated ambiguities of motive, are orchestrated with a richness that scarcely has an equal in ancient narrative” (Alder).

1. How do we set ourselves up toward sinful actions? How does David set himself up to sin in verses 1-3? What do verses 4-5 reveal about sin? What are some natural consequences of our sin?

David delegates his kingly responsibility of going out to battle and remains idle in his home.

“David, now a sedentary king removed from the field of action and endowed with a dangerous amount of leisure, is seen constantly through the agency of others, sending messengers within Jerusalem and out to Ammonite territory. Working through intermediaries, as the story will abundantly show, creates a whole new order of complications and unanticipated consequences” (Alder).

It seems like classic immaturity: David is not where he is supposed to be and he is not doing what he is supposed to be doing. He was lazing around when he saw Bathsheba. He even begins to use messengers for his own purposes rather than for the purposes of his kingdom. “Normally, messengers ‘went out’ to conduct war and negotiations and other public business, but here the messengers were used to arrange adultery and then murder” (Leithart).

Notice the rapid chain of verbs, especially in verse 4-5. “He walked on his roof and ‘saw’ the woman who was ‘good’ in appearance; having ‘seen’ something ‘good,’ he then ‘took’ her into his house. The sequence is familiar from Genesis 3” (Leithart). Instead of serving in his role as king over God’s people, David served himself and seized what was forbidden. A natural consequence followed when Bathsheba became pregnant.

2. What does the scene in verses 6-13 between David and Uriah reveal about the ways we tend to respond to our sinful actions? What does David’s action in verses 14-25 demonstrate about the measures we can go to in reaction to our sin? What was “the thing” David had done that displeased the Lord (verses 26-27)?

In the Old Testament, adultery was a capital offense which meant that David could have been tried and executed. Was David afraid of being executed? The passage does not reveal David's motive, but it does show the great lengths David goes to in order to cover up his sin. The first series of attempts clearly focus on David trying to get Uriah to lie with Bathsheba. Uriah shows the single-mindedness and faithfulness that David should be demonstrating as a king. Uriah does not go lie with his wife, rather he sleeps in the palace courts with his comrades. Uriah was acting in solidarity with his fellow soldiers who generally practiced sexual abstinence during times of combat. Uriah even shows concern for the ark and his fellow soldiers who are in the "open field". Does Uriah know about the adultery? Is he deliberately rebuking David? Again, the text does not go so far to reveal what Uriah knows or what he does not. However, it is clear that David continues in his single-mindedness to cover up his sin. After Uriah's compelling display of faithfulness, David still makes one more attempt to get Uriah to lie with Bathsheba; he gets him drunk. Even in his drunkenness, Uriah will not lay with his wife.

After David's first futile series of attempts to cover up his sin, he begins to act with even less logic and sense. He decides to go the extreme measure of having Uriah killed. David sends the orders to Joab by Uriah's own hand and Joab has to adjust the plan because David's intention would be too obvious. David, a once-competent king, can't even give an order to protect himself. He is losing his ability to reason in his sole focus to cover up his sin. After Uriah dies in battle, Joab sends a messenger back to David, but the messenger distorts the report.

"This throws ironic light on the opening verse: Messengers were racing hither and yon throughout the story, but messengers were unreliable and instructions were not carried out. This reinforces the fact that David's adultery had interfered with his ability to rule. . . He acted without sense, and his servants were not obeying orders" (Leithart).

David's response to the messenger shows how hardened and cold he had become in his efforts to cover up his sin. "David was not operating according to the principle that 'one man must die for the people,' but rather that 'many people must die for the one man - the king'" (Leithart).

The narrator waited until the last verse to make the explicit moral judgment on David. The "thing" that displeased God was the entirety of what happened.

3. What effects can our reactions to sin have on our own lives? On the lives of others? What is the most significant effect of our sinful actions and reactions?

Covering up sin can take a lot of effort, time, and energy. We become single-minded and our lives become dominated by ensuring that no one finds out or that consequences can be escaped. The ability to function in our normal roles

and the ability to reason can be lost. We become so self-consumed that we begin to use others for our own purposes or we withdraw from them. We lose the ability to serve others and even be in relationship with others. When we remain in our sin and cover it up we become hollow and less human. Things that should cut us to the heart don't anymore because we are cold and hardened.

The most significant effect of our sinful actions and reactions (i.e. covering up our sin) is that in all of it the Lord is displeased.

David, the great King of Israel, had fallen. Yet, God kept his promise that David's kingdom would not fail. God "sent" Jesus, his own Son, the Son of David, into the world as the King who went into battle and died for his people in order to cover their sins. Jesus was God's own Son with whom he was well-pleased! May we take our sins to Jesus who can cover our sins for us.

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THE GOSPEL OF LUKE
