

How excellent, O Lord, have Your thoughts been toward us, in that You made us after Your image. And when we were lost in sin, You sent Your Son to redeem us, and granted Your Spirit to renew us unto righteousness and true holiness. Thanks be to Your mercy, now and forever. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH, Ps. 139, p. 333)

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. 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. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, 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. 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." 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, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. 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. 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. 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.' 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. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

In Christ Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost, you and me, all sinners alike, dear fellow redeemed:

A childhood nightmare that can go on to become recurrent even well into adulthood is the trauma of realizing you are lost, forgotten, left behind. But oftentimes for young children they do not even know they are lost, and the real actual current nightmare is what the parents experience for that time their child is nowhere to be

found. When found children may object to be taken away from what has been grabbing their attention – the sandbox, a playful kitten.

So it is with many spiritually lost human beings, being so preoccupied with their immediate surroundings, they take no note of what eternal danger they are actually in. David in our text was oblivious to his impenitent state, but by God's grace was called back. So let us observe for our own warning, but also comfort: **Often the Lost Do not Know They Are Lost until Graciously Found.**

I

Everything seemed to be going well after David's sins of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband. He was able to bring Uriah's widow into his household as his wife. The sins were well hidden, probably even the murder of her husband from Bathsheba. He would appear to be kind and compassionate providing a place for both the widow and the supposed fatherless baby. David's conscience may have been troubled before God, but to all his neighbors he was innocent enough. In Psalm 32 David writes these words of confession when he hid his sin, but not to himself: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." We are not told if this was his experience before Nathan came to confront him.

David was slow at recognizing who the man was who killed the poor man's lamb in Nathan's parable. This would indicate that David was lost in his sin, separated from God, without realizing that he was lost spiritually and eternally. But God was gracious, after giving him nine months to repent, He sent His prophet to reach out to him in order that he may be rescued.

Have you ever wasted away in your guilt and shame? Perhaps even right now you are. If so, then you recognize your sense of being lost. This is good, because the Lord always seeks to save the lost. His forgiveness is never withheld from you in this life. But your pride may cause you to hide your sin, yes, even before God. You and I can so easily convince ourselves that what we have done is really not sin before God, but justified behavior. Or we may think, like David, noble deeds will make up for our sin. But all such efforts to hide our sins, leave us completely exposed before God.

At the end of the parable about the rich man slaughtering the poor man's lamb, we read these sobering words: "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, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he

had no pity.' Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'" David condemned himself! Nathan pointedly connected the dots for him.

II

David then heard from God's prophet the consequences of his sins, which were loving chastisements from the Lord. Would David arrogantly reject God's gracious confrontation and rescue? No, again by God's grace, we read those refreshing words: "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.'"

David, the lost sinner, was found. He repented of his sin and received forgiveness – sins of adultery and murder. Obviously Nathan's story touched the heart of this long-time shepherd with the convicting Law. Perhaps as a shepherd David had rescued lost sheep like Jesus mentions in our Gospel lesson. There is great joy when a lost sheep is found. Keep in mind what caused Jesus to tell this parable of the lost sheep. "The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled (against Jesus) - 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

Imagine the joy that broke out in heaven when David, once a man after God's own heart, who had fallen big time, now once again repented. Imagine the fear of Nathan approaching the king to convict him, knowing that like many other kings in history David might order his execution for daring to approach him with such news.

It is not an easy thing to confront what appears to be an impenitent sinner. But our Lord instructs us, His believers, to do just this. In Matthew Jesus says: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." David listened to Nathan and he was gained, or again we could say, he was found. The Lord's Apostle repeats this concern for the lost when he writes: "If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Most of us, especially those of us who were baptized in infancy were found when we had no idea that we were lost. Some of you, however, may remember a time when you felt your *lostness* spiritually. Again, Paul recognized it can work this way at times. In Athens he observed the altars to their gods, he noticed one marked *"to the unknown god"*. Many Athenians wanted to be spiritual, but recognized in their fear and uncertainty that they still may not know God. So Paul observed how God works through such thoughts and feelings: "God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of

us." While in truth it is always God who finds us in our *lostness*, He can and does at times bless lost sinners with a desire to be found.

The Lord has put away your sin too, my fellow redeemed. You have been found and rescued from your deserved everlasting separation from God. If the grace of God could reach out and rescue an adulterer and murderer such as David, so He has reached out to you and plucked you from danger and brought you to His loving bosom as your dear Shepherd.

It seems like everywhere we turn today, we are being confronted with news and images that lead us as sinners to conclude that we have finally been found in condemnation. Whether it be the pandemic, the social upheavals we see in our country, the threat of wars, all these things can so easily cause us to be filled with fear and question our status before God. But while we deserve all such anxiety, our Good Shepherd has found us. All of heaven rejoices. You, the sinner, have been found and rescued because He became the Lamb who was sacrificed for you upon the altar of the cross, not the altar to an unknown god, but the God of all grace. You are safely rescued. You are now restored to His flock and are at peace. Amen.