

Sermon Text (2 Samuel 11:26–12:13 ESV)

11:²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷ 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.

12:¹ 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.” ⁵ 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.”

⁷ 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. 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.’” ¹³ 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.”

Because of Jesus, You Shall Not Die but Live

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear

joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit” (Psalm 51:1–12).

What you just heard is a portion of Psalm 51. The heading of this psalm is: “A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” David wrote this psalm at the time of our reading for today. The words that he wrote are the words of a man who understands the severity of what he had done and is genuinely repentant. But what all had David done?

It all started “late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house” (2 Samuel 11:2). It was then “that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful” (2 Samuel 11:2). David knew that this woman, who was named Bathsheba, was already married, because, when he asked about her, someone said to him, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (2 Samuel 11:3). Despite this, and despite being married himself, David “sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her” (2 Samuel 11:4).

Now, surely, David thought that no one would know what they had done. But then, “[Bathsheba] conceived, and she sent and told David, ‘I am pregnant’” (2 Samuel 11:5). There was no way to cover up his sin now, or was there? David ordered that Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, be brought back from the war that was currently ongoing in the hopes that he would lay with her. Then, he would have no reason to think that the baby wasn’t his. However, Uriah didn’t do what David was hoping. Instead, “Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house” (2 Samuel 11:9). When asked why he did this, Uriah said,

“The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing” (2 Samuel 11:11). David then tried to get Uriah to lay with Bathsheba by getting him drunk, but, even then, Uriah “went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, [and] he did not go down to his house” (2 Samuel 11:13).

The likelihood of David covering up his sin wasn’t looking too good. So, what was David to do next? Instead of confessing his sin and repenting, “David wrote a letter to Joab [the commander of his army] and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, ‘Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.’ And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died” (2 Samuel 11:14–17). Then, as we hear in the beginning of our reading for today, “when [Bathsheba’s] mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son” (2 Samuel 11:27). For all that David had done, he deserved to die, as he himself said, even though he didn’t realize it when he said it, and I’m sure that we all agree with him.

When we hear this account from David’s life, we can find ourselves thinking, “How could David do such horrible things?” However, just as David was not aware that Nathan’s parable was about him, we often don’t realize that we have all done the same horrible things that David did. We may not have physically committed adultery. However, Jesus says that “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). We may not have physically murdered anyone or been responsible for a murder. However, Jesus says that “everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults

his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:22). The apostle John also says in his first letter, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15). You are an adulterer. You are a murderer. And you deserve to die for it, not just physically but also eternally in the fires of hell.

Often times, our first instinct when we realize that we have sinned is to try and cover it up, just as David did. Sometimes, it may even appear as though we succeeded. By having Uriah killed and then taking Bathsheba home to be his wife shortly afterward, no one would have suspected that anything wrong had been done, except for maybe a few men who served him, especially since there was still enough time before Bathsheba gave birth for David to make it appear as though the child was his through marriage and not through adultery. However, no matter how well David covered up his sin, he could never hide it from God, and neither can we.

Thankfully, God has accomplished something even better than simply covering up and hiding our sin. He has gotten rid of it completely. As Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin [that is, caused your sin not to remain before the LORD, to vanish, to be forgiven]” (2 Samuel 12:13). How did God accomplish this? By sending his only begotten Son to face the punishment that we rightfully deserve for all of our sins, the only way that our sins could be dealt with.

You deserved to die, but Jesus died in your place. And he didn’t just die physically, but he also experienced hell itself as he hung on the cross and his own Father turned his back on him. When Jesus said the words, “It is finished” (John 19:30), everything that needed to be done to forgive your sins, to make them vanish completely, had been accomplished. And the payment that Jesus made by the shedding of his own blood was truly for you, as well as everyone else throughout time: past, present, and future. When Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your

sin” (2 Samuel 12:13), this was because of what Jesus would do for him all those years in the future, and if Jesus’ sacrifice was applied to David all those years ago, it is surely also applied to you even now.

In order for David to take advantage of this forgiveness that Jesus won for him, he needed to be made aware of the sins that he had committed through the preaching of God’s Word. That Word was preached through Nathan the prophet. First, Nathan preached the Law. “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7) he said. “[Y]ou have despised [the LORD]” he said. And, through the Law, the Holy Spirit worked on David’s heart so that he repented of his sins in faith. Then, Nathan preached the Gospel to David, the good news that forgiveness is his through that same faith that the Holy Spirit created in his heart. “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Samuel 12:13).

God still works the same way today. When the Law is preached to you, the Holy Spirit makes you aware of your sins, and you realize just how horrible they are. Then, having faith in Jesus, trusting that Jesus has died for your sins, you ask, just as David did in Psalm 51, that God would have mercy on you, wash you, and make your heart clean. God answered David’s prayer, and he answers yours as well, and he gives you the comfort of the Gospel. Even though your sins may seem unforgiveable, there is no sin so big and so horrible that God can’t forgive it. As the apostle Paul, who was once a murderer himself, says in his first letter to Timothy, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15–16). Thanks be to God that he does not treat us as

our sins deserve but has mercy on us for the sake of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and gives us not eternal death in hell but eternal life in heaven.