David and Bathsheba
2 Samuel 11, 12

We're looking at the life of David. And if some famous people are remembered for the role they played in history, David is probably best remembered for his encounters with two different people. And one, his meeting with Goliath, the giant, ended in victory, but the other in abject defeat. And that was his encounter with Bathsheba.

Reading: 2 Samuel 11:1-12:15

The Downward Spiral
Now, the man, or woman, who commits adultery doesn't suddenly wake up one day in the bed of someone else and think, 'how did that happen?', do they? Instead, there are multiple, small decisions made along the way.

Look at v1: 'In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle…' And because David's the king, you're expecting to read, 'so David went to battle'. But instead, the writer says, 'David sent Joab'. The soldiers went, his general went, but not the king. Why not? Were there important affairs of state that kept him back? Or was it too risky to have the king on the frontlines? We're not told, but when you read, v2, that 'late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch' and you see David taking his siesta and strolling aimlessly around the rooftop, when his men are away fighting, the writer is telling you, something's wrong.

And the young man who faced down the giant is now resting face down on his couch, whilst others do the fighting. And David has disengaged. He's taken a rain check. He's forgotten that joy comes with service and dropped out of service. And as he gets up from his siesta he's a man who's forgotten that there's a battle going on. And that has consequences, doesn't it? I mean, you know from your own life, that there's nothing like being in a battle to keep you focused and disciplined. But think you're living in peace time, and get all comfortable, and hit the couch, and the need to stay close to God disappears. As it does with David, as God doesn't get a mention until the very last line of the story.

And when life is comfortable, and risk is low, and the spiritual temperature of your heart is falling, danger's lurking, isn't it? Because when things are just a bit boring, sin becomes exciting. And David on the rooftop is like David flicking through the channels, or surfing the net, late at night.

You see, whilst David doesn't go to battle, the battle most assuredly comes to him.

Verse 2, 'He saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.' So David sees, but then he looks. And he looks long enough to know she's beautiful. And he wants her.

Interesting, isn't it? The man once so captivated by God and his beauty, is captivated by Bathsheba and her beauty; and in his heart he exchanges God's glory for that of a woman in a bathtub. 'That's how I'll be happy! That's what I want. That's how I'll get some excitement back in my life.'

Proverbs 11:22 says 'Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.' And there's this other person, and you look at them, and man they're attractive, and you think 'I want that, in my bed, in my life' - but it's like seeing a gold ring in a pig's nose and thinking - I want that ring in my house, but you forget it's attached to a pig covered in muck. And what Bathsheba, and any modern equivalent, offers is deceptive. You think you're getting a gold ring, but the pig - the brokenness, the pain, the disgrace, the damage to others, comes with it.

But David just sees the ring - glittering in a bathtub.

In their book Every Man's Battle, the authors suggest the technique of 'bouncing your eyes'. You see someone who's physically attractive, you feel that temptation to look longer, but instead bounce your eyes, and look away. And I've personally found that incredibly helpful. But maybe for you it's not someone else's body, maybe it's the advertising that leaves you feeling discontented; maybe it's what someone else has that leaves you feeling envious. Well, either physically, or internally, with the eyes of your heart, look away. Bounce your eyes.

Sadly, David doesn't. Instead, v3, 'David sent and inquired about the woman' and he takes his next step down. And in v3 he gets his answer, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So the woman David's looking at is not an object, she's someone's daughter. And, personally, I've found that helpful to remember when I'm ever tempted to look at porn. That somewhere there is a father grieving over what has become of his daughter; and if there isn't then the tragedy is all the greater. But whether or not her earthly father cares, there is a heavenly Father who most definitely does.

But Bathsheba is also someone else's wife. Uriah the Hittite, one of David's bravest and most loyal soldiers. A man who risked his life for David. And he's Uriah *the Hittite* - a foreigner in Israel, a man who should have been afforded special protection by the king.

And knowing all that should have given David pause. But if he does pause, it's not for long. Verse 4, 'So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him,' and he takes his next step. And then the next, 'And he lay with her.'

And so David gets the gold ring he wanted, he has his few moments of pleasure. The problem is that the pig is now in the palace. Verse 5, 'And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."' And in what follows we see David at his most devious - as he does what we so often do, trying to cover-up. And he calls Uriah home in the hope that he'll sleep with his wife and think the baby's his.

Verse 8, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And that's not because Uriah's feet smell, is it? He's saying, 'go and enjoy your wife's hospitality; you deserve it!' And v8 tells us he even sends 'a present from the king': some food and wine, some candles, to help the romantic mood.

The problem is that Uriah the foreigner is more noble than the king. And he's more concerned about the battlefield, than the bedroom. Because in Uriah's mind he's still on duty.

So David takes another step, and gets Uriah drunk. But even when he's drunk, v13, 'He did not go down to his house.'

So now David faces a choice doesn't he? He could just let events take their course. But if he ends up having to admit to adultery, with one of his men's wives, when they are away fighting for him, think of the repercussions - for his men's loyalty, or morale. And adultery is a capital crime, and what good would it serve if he, the king, loses his life? I mean, the nation needs me. But there is an alternative, isn't there? And, after all, being a leader is all about making the hard decisions.

Verses 14-15, ‘In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab… “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting… that he may be struck down, and die.” And David orders the murder of one of his most faithful and loyal men. And he’s behaving more like Saul, who tried to murder him, than a man after God’s own heart.

But it’s not just Uriah who dies. Verse 17: ‘And the men of the city came out and fought… and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died.’

It’s a tragic reminder, isn’t it, that sin always leads to death. That when we make these wrong calculations of what will make us happy something always dies: things like hope and righteousness, and relationships and love.

And for David, each step along the way must have seemed so minor. But each one took him further down the spiral. I once read of a pastor who wrote out the consequences for him, his wife, his kids, his church, the Lord’s name, if he sinned like this, and he recommended his readers do the same. I recommend it to you. It is very sobering. Because maybe there’s a beautiful woman in the office, or some great looking guy who pays you attention, and you think ‘she’s beautiful, this is going to be so beautiful’; or ‘he’s hot, this is going to be so hot’. And 18 months later it is anything but beautiful and hot.

But it’s not just others who this destroys. Did you notice David’s response when Joab sends back word that Uriah and the others are dead? Verse 25, ‘David said to the messenger, “Thus you shall say to Joab, “Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another.”’ Some of his bravest men have just died, because of him, and David plays the philosopher. ‘Don’t worry, you win some, you lose some.’ And sin has calloused him. He thought having sex with Bathsheba would make him feel alive, and instead he’s emotionally, morally, spiritually blunted.

But that’s what happens if we keep descending the spiral, isn’t it? Our hearts grow harder.

But the Bible sees it very differently from David. And in v26, when David thinks it’s all done and dusted, the writer once again calls Bathsheba, ‘the wife of Uriah’. And David may be indifferent, but God isn’t. Because if David says to Joab in v25, ‘Do not let this matter displease you’, in v27 the writers states, ominously, ‘The thing that David had done displeased the Lord.’

So why doesn’t David stop? Or think of the temptations you might face: maybe for you it *is* a wrong relationship, or maybe it’s fabricating research data, or pursuing a borderline business deal, or massaging your resume. Why doesn’t David stop when he can?

The Idols Underneath

Now, David genuinely loves God. But right now, something else has his heart, doesn’t it. And David starts by breaking the 10th commandment - do not covet another man’s wife. Then he breaks the 7th - do not commit adultery; and then the 6th - do not murder. But those are only possible because he first breaks the first: you shall have no gods before me. But another god, the age old idol of sex - of pleasure, does have David’s heart, doesn’t it. ‘If I can have her, I’ll be happy.’

And as the narrator tells the story, it all happens so quickly. David sees her, calls her, has sex with her, and sends her home. No words are spoken, no conversation made. David never even calls her

by name. To David, she's just 'the woman'. So this isn't love at first sight, this is lust. Proverbs 30:20 says, 'This is the way of an adulteress [or adulterer]: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have done nothing wrong."' And sex is just like eating a meal, it's about satisfying my appetite, my hunger. And for David sex is something that gives him what he wants.

But what does he want?

Well, just when David thinks he's got away with this, the writer tells us, 12:1, 'The Lord sent Nathan.' And Nathan tells a story, v2, of a 'rich man [who] had very many flocks and herds.' In other words, he's a wealthy shepherd… just like David. And there's a poor man, v3, who 'had nothing but one little ewe lamb… and it was like a daughter to him.' And do you know the Hebrew word for daughter? Bath - the first part of Bath-sheba's name.

And the rich man wants a lamb for dinner. So what does he do? He takes and devours the poor man's. Why? Because he can, because he's hungry, because he's powerful. And David sees the appalling injustice - the man deserves to die! Until Nathan utters those searing words, v7, "You are the man!"

Because just like the rich man, God has given David position and possessions and power, but just like the rich man David has used that power to take and grasp, and to harm one who deserved his protection. He has used power for his own ends, for his own appetite, because it makes him feel… powerful.

You see, when you look at the way the narrator tells this story, it consists of David giving one order after another. And when he issues the order to call Bathsheba - do you think he feels like a sinner on the edge, or a man of power, who can call women to come and they come? And when Bathsheba tells him she's pregnant, does he admit his sin, or seek to control things? And when he gets Uriah drunk, does David get drunk or stay in control? And when he sends Uriah to his death, does he feel like a guilty schemer, or like a king, taking command?

You see, it's not just sex David has been seduced by, it's power. The power to please himself.

Now, our stories are unlikely to be as dramatic. But power and control still tempt us, don't they? I mean, don't you want to be the one to decide for yourself what's right and wrong? To live by your own code, to be in control of your own life. And think of the thrill of being able to control others!

The problem is that David can't control everything. And what starts out feeling so good, ends so bad. And last week we saw Nathan tell him that God's steadfast love would never leave David's house; but now, Nathan says that trauma and misery and sexual sin will also come upon his house. And the accounting for David's sin will be long and costly, as he reaps the whirlwind of his sin.

So, is there no hope for him? Or what about us? Because whilst our story may not be as dramatic, all of us have chosen other stuff over God, and pursued money or sex or intimacy or power; and maybe others have been damaged by our behaviours; or maybe you've been on the receiving end of damage done to you. So where's the hope here for David and David look-a-likes, and for those hurt by them?

The Path Back Up

Look at v13, as David says, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And David could have made excuses about the pressures of leadership; or tried to shift the blame, to Bathsheba, or about how unresponsive his other wives were; or he could have tried to rationalise it, ‘I mean, what’s a man supposed to do? She’s beautiful! It’s just natural!’ But he doesn’t. He confesses and he repents.

And as you read his confession in Psalm 51, penned in the aftermath of all this, David realises who he is before God. Verse 5, ‘Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.’ So this is no celebrity apology is it? This is no, ‘this doesn’t reflect who I really am, I’m better than this.’ David knows this is the real him. He realises that his sin is at the core of who he is.

And so he throws himself upon the mercy of God, because he knows that whilst God is his righteous judge, he is also his only hope. Verses 1-2 ‘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!’ So this is not a request to go into rehab is it? It’s a plea for cleansing. It’s a plea that God would deal with his heart that loves money, and sex and power more than God.

And that is where David’s, and our, hope lies. Because whilst God is absolutely just, he is also abounding in mercy. And Nathan says to him, v13, “The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

But how can God do that, and forgive him like that?! David’s committed adultery! He’s murdered! ‘The Lord has put away your sin’ Really?! So easily? When David has put away a man to his grave?

Well, look what David prays, Psalm 51:7, ‘Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than the snow.’ And for David’s first readers that would have set bells ringing. You see, there are two other places in the Old Testament where hyssop gets mentioned. The first was Passover. And the people of Israel were told to take a hyssop branch and dip it in the blood of a lamb, and paint that blood on their doorposts to protect them from the angel of death as it passed over and freed them from slavery in Egypt. The second was when a leper came to be cleansed, and the priest was to take a hyssop branch, and dip it in the blood of a sacrificial animal, and sprinkle that blood over the leper to cleanse him.

And David knows he needs healing from the sin that eats away at his life like leprosy destroys a leper. And he knows he needs something that will cover him from God’s anger, and free him from the slavery of sin, as the blood of the Passover lamb delivered the Israelites.

But what can ever do that - for him or for us?

Well, the next time we read the words ‘the wife of Uriah’ is at the beginning of the gospel of Matthew, in the genealogy of Jesus. And in that long list of names four women get mentioned. And each is named, except Bathsheba. She’s still ‘the wife of Uriah’ (Matt 1:6), because God will not sweep this under the carpet. And yet, it’s through the brokenness of this relationship that God comes into the brokenness of our world.

And rather than use power to grasp, Jesus gave up his power that we might receive. And as David stands accused before Nathan, Nathan says, ‘you are the man!’, and Jesus stands accused before the

crowd and Pilate says, “Behold the man!” (John 19:5). Two men; two kings of Israel on trial for their lives.

But rather than rob a man of his lamb, Christ becomes the lamb: the Passover lamb that protects and delivers every David. The ultimate sacrifice which cleanses every moral leper. And a king of the Jews does die for David’s sins, and our sins, it’s just not David. Instead David’s greatest Son gives his life for the guilty, so that we might be cleansed of the leprosy of sin and freed from its slavey. So that, in David’s words, he might ‘Restore to me the joy of your salvation.’ (Ps 51:12).

And as we see the King of Israel, crowned with thorns, sacrificing himself for us, it brings home to us the awfulness of our sin, however deceptive its beauty, and the beauty and the grace and the love of God. And as we keep that image before our eyes we will love sin less and love God more. So that, rather than use people, or power, we serve them, and find in Christ the joy above every joy.