

Today is our last Sunday in this series on David. Next week we will be in Advent, the season leading up to Christmas. But we will return to David for a more stories in the new year. Today's message is from 2nd Samuel chapters 11 and 12.

It was spring in Israel and we know what that season is like in the Hawkes Bay. The blossom on the trees, the new life, the growth. It is a great season, and in Israel all of those years ago the trees were bursting into blossom as well.

But in those times in Israel, spring was also the season when kings went to war. That was the season for battles. And the army of Israel was going to off to fight, like it did every spring.

But that year, something was different. David the king, David the warrior, David the one who had slain Goliath, David the one who they had made up songs about celebrating him fighting the enemies of Israel. That year, David chose to stay home in Jerusalem.

David thought that he had done his dash. He had spent his time in the wilderness, he had worked hard, fought hard for decades. This was a time for others, a time for new warriors to step up. He deserved a good rest. He had earned it. And as a king he could decide what he would do. So that year David stayed at home, resting in comfort while Joab his army commander lead the army out to war.

It so happened, as David was at home with the army gone, spending his days resting, that late one afternoon, he rose from his couch and went for a walk on the flat roof of his house. And as he did that he looked out over the city of Jerusalem and the houses nearby.

And because he was home not where his place was with the army, because he was out looking over the city in the afternoon, David saw a beautiful woman taking a

bath in her house nearby. David didn't avert his gaze, he saw her, his eyes lingered, he lusted, he desired and he acted on those desires.

David, sent someone to find out who she was. And discovered that she was Bathsheba, married to Uriah the Hittite. Uriah, one of David's famous 30 elite warriors was an immigrant who had converted, to become a Jew. Uriah wasn't home. He was with the army, out fighting, out where David should have been as well. But David was in Jerusalem, making bad choices. He sent for Bathsheba, he slept with her and then sent her back home. Thinking that was all that there was to it. Till Bathsheba became pregnant.

David tried to cover things up.

First off, bring Uriah home. He will sleep with his wife, maybe he won't count to 40, maybe he will think that the child is his.

Uriah came back to Jerusalem, David encouraged him to go home, to have a bath and a rest. But Uriah slept the night outside. When David asked him about it he said, look "My commander Joab and all the army are roughing it out in the fields. So, how can I go home and eat and drink and enjoy my wife? On your life, I'll not do it!"

The next day, David tried to get Uriah drunk, so that he would let his guard down and sleep with his wife. But Uriah remained loyal and didn't go home.

So David came up with another evil plan as he desperately tried to cover up for his own sin. He sent Uriah back to the army with a sealed letter for Joab saying

"Put Uriah in the front lines where the fighting is the fiercest. Then pull back and leave him exposed. Make sure that he is killed."

And that is what happened, Uriah and several others in the army were killed, sacrificed as pawns as David desperately tried to cover up for his own sin. Bathsheba mourned for her husband but not for very long, and she married David, becoming another of his wives before her child was born.

And David thought that he had gotten away with it all.

But what happened really displeased God. It stunk.

So God sent the prophet Nathan to David.

And Nathan came and told David a story, “There were two men in the same city—one rich, the other poor. The rich man had huge flocks of sheep, herds of cattle. The poor man had nothing but one little female lamb, which he had bought and raised. It grew up with him and his children as a member of the family. It ate off his plate and drank from his cup and slept on his bed. It was like a daughter to him.”

“One day a traveler dropped in on the rich man. He was too stingy to take an animal from his own herds or flocks to make a meal for his visitor, so he took the poor man’s lamb, killed it and prepared it as a meal to set before his guest.” When he heard the story David, exploded in anger. “As surely as God lives,” he said to Nathan, “the man who did this deserves to die. He must repay for the lamb four times over for his crime and for his lack of compassion.

Then Nathan said to David "You are the man".

And Nathan told David what God's judgement on him was. That God said look I made you king over Israel. I freed you from the fist of Saul. I gave you your master’s daughter and other wives to have and to hold. I gave you both Israel and Judah. And if that hadn’t been enough, I’d have gladly thrown in much more. So why have you despised God and done such an evil thing? David, you

murdered Uriah the Hittite, you took his wife as your wife. You, had Uriah killed with an Ammonite sword! And now, because you treated God with such contempt and took Uriah the Hittite's wife as your wife, killing and murder will continually plague your family. I'll make trouble for you out of your own family. "

David fell before Nathan confessing, pleading, "I've sinned against God."

David asked for forgiveness.

This wasn't just some superficial words, this was when David wrote Psalm 51.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

This was a real pleading from the core of his being for forgiveness.

And Nathan pronounced, "Yes, God forgives your sin. You won't die for it. But there will be consequences. The son born to you and Bathsheba will die." and that is what happened.

David's evil sin came to light and was exposed. And even though he asked for forgiveness, and was forgiven. There were consequences, from that time onwards.

But there were also new beginnings. David and Bathsheba had another son Solomon. Solomon became king and was known as the wisest person ever. In the gospel of Matthew, the whakapapa, the ancestry of Jesus is described. And right there is Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba.

So as well as the consequences of the sin, because David asked for forgiveness there were new beginnings as well.

Now this story is in the bible for a reason. It is there on purpose. Other people in power have done similar things over time, committed adultery and then tried to hide from the consequences. Bill Clinton, Charles, Dianna, immediately spring to mind, and sadly the list is very long. There have been some horrific stories of Christians who have fallen from God's path for them as well. People like Graham Capill.

And then amongst the absolute train wrecks, there have been the less spectacular fender benders as well. Those whose fire has gradually cooled, those who have slipped into sins which they think can be safely hidden where no one can see. Surely if it feels good and seems natural then it is ok. There are those who gradually drift away. And the path that they walk bit by bit diverges away from that of following Jesus.

One of the sayings that is often used about rugby is that it is a game of two halves. Often a side will start strongly and then fade and end up losing. I can remember watching matches like that.

And there is a great temptation for our Christian life to be a game of two halves as well. For us to have a strong start and then not to finish well.

And that first critical point for David, that point where his path started to diverge from God's path for him, was when he decided to stay in Jerusalem in comfort, rather than being with his army, which was where he should have been.

If he was where God had called him to be, doing what God had called him to do then the temptation of Bathsheba would never have occurred.

And that critical point, that temptation David faced is one which is common to us as well.

Like David, we may have spent time in the wilderness, we might have worked hard for many years and sacrificed much. We might feel like we deserve a good rest. That we have earned it.

And there is nothing wrong with rest and comfort as long as we do not lose sight of who God has called us to be and what God has called us to do.

David did not need to be out there on the front line of the battle. That is not the place of the king. But he needed to be with his army, to still be reminded of the sacrifices that others were making on his behalf. Uriah knew that. That is why he wouldn't even go home to his wife when he was in Jerusalem.

By not being with the army, and sitting at home, relaxing in comfort, avoiding what God had called him, chosen him to do and to be, David put himself in the clear position where temptation would come his way. And then having done that, having made one wrong choice, making others became easier and David lacked the moral strength to make the right choices, until God used Nathan to confront him.

For us, as the years go by, we do not need to do things in the same way that we used to do them.

Times change, family circumstances change, work requirements change. Each of them provides new opportunities and new challenges. I am not saying, that we need to do what we did twenty or thirty years ago. We might be in a time

and season where we do more, or a time and season where we do less, or it might be doing different things.

But finishing well means continuing to do what God has called us to do and continuing to be who God has called us to be. Not deciding that our walk, our race is over and we can stay home and just relax.

The bible is full of images of the way we need to keep on being connected with God and with others. It is full of images about needing to keep things fresh. In the Exodus, the manna in the desert needed to be collected daily, otherwise it rotted. There is a need for us to have a fresh vibrant relationship with God, there is a need for us to be connected with others. We cannot live off our past for ever.

As well as providing a warning to us, an encouragement for us to finish well.

This passage also shows us that there is a path of forgiveness if we do fall. God does forgive.

The eternal consequences of our sin are dealt with. Jesus took those on the cross. But forgiveness does not mean that the clock is turned back and everything is erased.

There are consequences. From then on David faced the results of the decisions that he had made.

The greater the number and the bigger the impact of the bad choices, the greater the consequences will be. That is true then, and it is true now.

But there is forgiveness from God, the eternal consequences are dealt with. God is there with us as we walk through the more immediate consequences.

And there can also be new beginnings, just like what happened with David and Bathsheba and the birth of Solomon. If we ask for forgiveness there can be new beginnings as well.

It is my prayer, that we would not let things get too bad. That we would wake up and realise the path we are on as soon as possible.

That we would not sleep walk into a place where we are vulnerable like David did. That we would continue to be who God has called us to be, that we would continue to do what God has called us to do. That we would all finish strongly.

But if we have fallen that we do ask God for forgiveness, that we work through the consequences, and that as the new beginnings and opportunities come along, that we will rejoice as well.

Amen.