

As promised last week, today we get not the end of David's story but at least some resolution to the worst chapter of David's story. To review: From humble beginnings and legendary bravery, David became Israel's most beloved king; but power and position soon made him too comfortable, and he started to abandon his duties as Israel's leader. He sends his army to fight without him, and one day after a nap, he spies on Bathsheba, one his soldier's wives, and sends guards to capture her, and impregnates her. He recalls her husband Uriah from the war, thinking that after a few nights enjoying the comforts of home, Uriah will assume that when Bathsheba has the baby, it's his; but Uriah is too honorable to visit his wife when the rest of the army is still camped out in the field, so David's clever plot fails. David moves on to Plan B, telling the commander to send Uriah to the frontlines so he's sure to be killed. This time, David's treachery works and that's where we pick up the story today. Uriah dies, Bathsheba mourns, and David again sends for her and makes her one of his wives.

The one person who would have questioned Bathsheba's pregnancy is out of the picture, so from David's perspective, the problem is solved. So as long as nobody finds out what he's done, he's in the clear. Even if they did, as king, David can do basically whatever he wants. It's like in the Disney version of Aladdin when Jafar says "You've heard of the golden rule, haven't you? He who has the gold makes the rules." So David doesn't really have to be concerned with any consequences beyond his own reputation; he just doesn't want anyone to think he's a bad guy. Never mind that Uriah is dead and Bathsheba is pregnant, *and* in mourning, *and* now in a marriage that she had no more agency in choosing than she had when David first sent for her. Even if she could have refused to marry the king, as a pregnant widow, she didn't have many options. That he got the girl in the end and kept his reputation in tact was all that mattered to David. Except that wasn't all that mattered to God.

The Lord sends the prophet Nathan to tell David a little parable: a rich man with very many flocks and herds is too greedy to give up any of his own property for a guest, so he takes a poor man's one beloved lamb and has a barbecue. In a stunning display of hypocrisy and lack of self-awareness, David is enraged at the rich man in the story. Just in case you thought our modern politicians were the first to condemn the other side for what they certainly do themselves, in fact irony died a long time ago, when David fails to see that he has acted just like the villain in Nathan's allegory. *You are the man!* Nathan says to David, pointing out how much the Lord had given to him, which made him taking another man's wife an even more

egregious sin, and promising that the evil David has set in motion will very publicly plague him and his family for years. That the Lord does not intervene to save David from the consequences of his own actions is a lesson in humility: the name *David* means *Beloved of God*...but he is not more beloved than God's other children.

Now that his crimes are out in the open, David confesses: *I have sinned against the Lord*. But the Lord isn't the only one David sinned against. This story is a good reminder that God's laws are not arbitrary but exist to keep us from hurting one another. David's sin didn't just affect his righteousness before the Lord; Bathsheba ended up pregnant and Uriah ended up dead because of David's actions. And although David doesn't make his confession until this point in the story, and even if as king he wouldn't have been held accountable, he knew all along that what he was doing was wrong; otherwise he wouldn't have tried to cover it up.

David's story illuminates an uncomfortable truth about human nature: usually the problem is not that we don't know right from wrong. We do. We have the commandments, we have speed limits, we have a conscience and the ethical ideals of a moral society to tell us right from wrong. The problem is that we can often think of reasons to justify why the rules that apply to everyone else don't count in our particular situation. We jump to point out unethical behavior in someone else or in another group of people, but we just as quickly find excuses for why it's different for us, for our families, for however we define *our side*. We're good at judging others yet lenient with ourselves. David condemned the rich man in Nathan's story while not at all recognizing the same greed and lack of empathy in himself. As king, David didn't think the rules applied to him. The Lord said, nope, the rules apply to everyone.

When we think our circumstances are the exception to the rule and justify for ourselves what we'd condemn in someone else, we pile one wrong on top of another, because we're essentially behaving as if we believe God that loves us more than God loves them; that we more clearly bear the image of God than they do—whatever they are. But God's judgment against David was also a testament to God suffering with Bathsheba's abuse and Uriah's injustice; God doesn't want any of us to be the collateral damage of another person's self-centeredness. I don't know how to fix all the world's problems, how to end hunger or violence or poverty, how to achieve world peace. But I bet a good place to start is to remember that we'll never encounter another person or another group of people whom God does not love just as much as God loves us. May we give to others the mercy, grace, and love that God first gave to us.