

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: God's Life-Transforming Work**

(Studies in the life of David)

### **A Matter of Personal Sovereignty**

(2 Samuel 11)

Study #5

#### **Introduction: Some messages are easier to give / hear than others...**

Last Sunday's message was fun to bring, and I was delighted to bring it. I hope it was a delight to hear. Our theme was the worship of God and David led us all the way.

We watched as David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem with great celebration and fanfare. The whole episode reminded us that God is holy and personal, that God is what we want and need, and that we were born to worship God with all our strength!

Sadly, today's message won't be so delightful - to give or to hear. This won't be fun. But my fervent prayer is that God will use it to open our eyes and to bring about transformation.

When we come to 2 Samuel 11, David has been king of Israel for about twenty years.<sup>1</sup> After all that time of dealing with the pressures of kingship, the king decided that it was time for a break.

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<sup>1</sup> To re-cap: David, the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, was anointed by Samuel to succeed King Saul as Israel's king. Between the anointing and the coronation were ten long years of being chased by and persecuted by King Saul. He wrote songs by the score and became the captain of a band of the distressed, the indebted, and the discontented. Finally, King Saul died, and David became king. He consolidated his kingdom, with God promising an enduring dynasty. Enemies were less numerous and less dangerous. David's kingdom was strong, his army without peer.

We catch up with David one spring evening at his palace in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Setting the Scene: It's "battle time" for kings (11:1)**

To set the context, a neighboring nation, the Ammonites, had done things to Israel that called for a military response.<sup>3</sup> King David gave that response, but he also did something we wouldn't have expected him to do.

***[2 Samuel 11:1a] Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they brought destruction on the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed in Jerusalem.***

Normally David went to war with his army. Not this year. He's off-duty. We can almost hear his thoughts, *"I've done my time, paid my dues. I've got an army for this. Joab can handle this."*<sup>4</sup>

So, while David's army was forty miles away, fighting, David was at home in his Jerusalem palace.

The narrative begins in the early evening hours. The king has just gotten up from a late afternoon nap.

#### **King David Commits Adultery (11:2-5)**

#### **David Leads Himself into Temptation (11:2-3)**

*The dangerous look (v. 2)*

***[2a] Now at evening time David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house...***

So, what does a king see when he looks over his balcony, with the outside light dimming, at the homes in his capitol city?

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars estimate that David was near fifty at the time of this story.

<sup>3</sup> See 2 Samuel 10 for some of the background with the Ammonites.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 16:49 says that among the sins of the city of Sodom was her *"careless ease,"* especially because of her prosperity. David validates the old proverb that idle hands really are the devil's workshop.

I read a bunch of books to our grandchildren when they were in town over Christmas. One was Dr. Seuss' classic, Yertle the Turtle.

Do you remember Yertle's most famous line: *"I'm Yertle the Turtle, O marvelous me, for I am the ruler of all that I see."*?

I wonder if David was thinking along those lines.

I picture roving eyes, like eyes sometimes rove on a computer screen looking for something interesting. David found something interesting.<sup>5</sup>

***[2b]...from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance.***

This is dangerous, and we know it. Centuries earlier, another Israelite, Joseph, faced sexual temptation. When he faced his hour of temptation he ran away. Joseph literally RAN AWAY.<sup>6</sup>

David didn't run away. He didn't even look away. David kept looking at this woman.

He looked long enough to learn more than he should have known about her. Long enough to know that she was ***"very beautiful."***

*The fatal follow-up (v. 3)*

***[3a] So David sent servants and inquired about the woman.***

I imagine him casually asking, *"Say, who is the woman who lives down there on Main Street, fourth house down from the palace? See what you can find out for me, OK?"*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It is not a stretch to suspect that David had reasons for going up to get a bird's eye view of his kingdom. He may have known very well or may have hoped very much that he would see what he did ultimately see.

<sup>6</sup> See Genesis 39.

<sup>7</sup> What possible reason could David have had for wanting this information? Why would he want to know anything about her? Only if he is already scheming.

If we had been among those servants David asked, we would be wondering why our God-fearing king wanted that information.

David had only asked about the woman. Not about the family or the husband. But David was the king. The king can ask for any info he wants. So, so off for the information we would go.

Here's the report one of the servants gave: ***[3b]...**"Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"*****<sup>8</sup>

From elsewhere in Scripture, we know that Uriah was one of David's most valiant soldiers. David would have known Uriah well.<sup>9</sup>

David has now looked longer than was proper. He has asked questions he should not have asked.

We wish he would stop. But lust has now kicked into high gear, and David isn't looking for the brakes.<sup>10</sup>

### **Lust Leads to Sin (11:4)**

*King David violated Bathsheba (v. 4a)*

***[4] Then David sent messengers and had her brought, and when she came to him, he slept with her...***

Scripture gives us no details. Nothing sensational. Just the fact. King David of Israel has committed sexual sin. He has committed adultery.

These messengers did nothing wrong in obeying their king's orders to bring a woman to the palace. The only one in this story who bears guilt is David. Only David.

<sup>8</sup> The servant has provided more information than was requested. Did he include the bit about Uriah, suspecting what the king had in mind, as an attempt to bring the king to his senses?

<sup>9</sup> It might be that Uriah had been one of those distressed, discontented, indebted men who followed David when he fled from King Saul in the wilderness.

<sup>10</sup> See James 1:13-15 for the pattern of temptation to lust to sin to death that is playing out here in 2 Samuel 11.

Many have asked - and you may wonder - "*What about Bathsheba?*" It takes two, after all. What guilt does she bear here?

OK. Let's look at that. What can we learn about what kind of a woman Bathsheba was.

*King David violated "torah" (v. 4b)*

Some Bible students say that Bathsheba was a lonely woman who was looking for attention while her husband was away at war.

I've read others who say that her public bathing advertised her availability, that it was an invitation to the men of the city.

Some even suggest that she was intentionally signaling to David since a portion of his palace balcony gave a view into her courtyard.<sup>11</sup>

Nothing could be further from the truth. Something else entirely was going on here. Let me explain.

The way the New American Standard Bible reads (usually a very reliable Bible translation) we get the impression that Bathsheba "***purified herself from her uncleanness***" AFTER David lay with her.

However, the Hebrew text makes it clear that the bath she was taking when David saw her from his palace balcony, PRIOR TO the act, was the bath that purified her from her uncleanness.

See, the Old Testament set out requirements for women to bathe for ceremonial cleansing every month.<sup>12</sup> And it was this washing that Bathsheba was tending to when David sent for her.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Today, a woman has a legal right to say "No" at any point in an encounter. It didn't work that way for women in the ancient Near East, especially when dealing with a powerful man. (See the story of Lot, Genesis 19; Michal, 1 Samuel 25; Queen Vashti, Esther 1) Bathsheba was powerless given that David sent for her.

<sup>12</sup> See Lev. 12:2-5; 15:18-28; 18:19. These verses describe the purification process for women after childbirth or after menstruation.

<sup>13</sup> This is in the text to show that David knew this. The only way for him to have known this (that she was not just taking a normal bath) was by her telling him, no doubt to dissuade him from his intended action.

The verse should properly read,

***[4] David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then, she returned to her house.***<sup>14</sup>

When David saw Bathsheba bathing, far from being provocative, she was obeying the Old Testament Law's requirements.

There is nothing in the text to suggest that she was advertising availability. She was washing in the privacy of her own courtyard.<sup>15</sup>

What kind of a woman was Bathsheba? She was a God-fearing, faithful woman. The idea that Bathsheba was lonely or was hungering for affection finds no support in the Bible.

Again, the only guilty party in this episode is David.<sup>16</sup>

As king, he was the guardian of God's Law. Here, he saw a woman, lusted for her, and violated her while she was in the act of obeying the Law he was sworn to uphold.<sup>17</sup>

After violating her, David returned her to her (empty) house. After all, he couldn't have her spend the night. People in the palace might get suspicious. People might talk.

A sobering note to the redeemed...

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<sup>14</sup> I write this not because I am a scholar in the Hebrew language, but because this is the consensus of Hebrew scholars. This understanding is reflected in the English Standard Version, the New International Version, the King James and New King James, The Message, and the New Living Translation.

<sup>15</sup> And to whom would she be advertising herself? The men of the city were away at war, fighting the Ammonites. Maybe she did know that David could see her from his palace, but what did she have to fear from her God-fearing king?

<sup>16</sup> Bathsheba was not acting in an unbecoming manner. She assumed that the men of the city were away at battle, including, the king. David is much more of a peeping Tom than Bathsheba is an exhibitionist. If I read the story right, even David's seeing Bathsheba is the result of her keeping the law.

<sup>17</sup> David acted like the king whom Samuel had warned the people about who "***takes.***" (1 Sam. 8:10-18)

Note to self: David did all of this as a redeemed man. Redeemed people sometimes do very ugly things.<sup>18</sup>

- **Abraham** pawned off his wife, Sarah, as his sister - twice - so that he would be safe.
- **Solomon** committed idolatry.
- **Simon Peter** denied knowing Jesus three times.
- **Ananias** and **Sapphira** lied to the Holy Spirit.
- **Barnabas** fell prey to hypocrisy.

The potential for evil in every one of us is very real. Here we see that it was active in David, ***“the man after God’s own heart.”***

It is tempting to think that we are beyond falling into sin. The truth is, we are most vulnerable to falling when we think we can’t fall.

Then, believing ourselves invulnerable, if we fall, like David fell, we will next be tempted to think, like David thought, *“I can sin in secret. I can successfully hide. I can sin with impunity. No one will ever know.”*

That was David. He thought he could get away with it.

But the New Testament exposes this lie when Paul writes, ***[Galatians 6:7] Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap.***

It is the inviolable Law of the Harvest. We reap what we sow. As the poet Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote, *“Everyone, soon or late, sits down to a banquet of consequences.”*

King David is about to be served a very complicating banquet of consequences.

### **Bathsheba Sends a Note (11:5)**

Some weeks after the event, Bathsheba sent David a note. It was not a love note. It was a bombshell.

***[5] But the woman conceived; so she sent word and informed David, and said, “I am pregnant.”***

Bathsheba wasn’t being chatty. She expected David, the king, to do something, to make things right.

Well, whatever it was she might have hoped David would do, it was NOT what he, in fact, did.

Quickly, decisively, David contacted Joab, the general who was commanding the Jewish forces battling the Ammonites.

### **King David Commits Murder (11:6-27a)**

#### **In Search of an Alibi (vv. 6-13)**

*Call the husband home (vv. 6-9)*

***[6] Then David sent word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So Joab sent Uriah to David.***

And for what reason did David send for Uriah to come home from the battlefield?

Is he going to set up a meeting to confess to Uriah what he has done? Is he going to humble himself before Uriah and plead for mercy?

Nope. Listen.

Uriah and David knew each other well, so it would not have been strange for David to question Uriah about how Joab was doing, about how things were going for the army on the front lines. (v. 7)

So, he asked those questions. But David doesn’t really care about that stuff. The whole point of bringing Uriah to Jerusalem is to get Uriah to sleep with his wife as quickly as possible.

Darkness falls as David and Uriah talk. David stifles a fake yawn and tells Uriah, ***[8a]...“Go down to your house, and wash your feet.”***

<sup>18</sup> *“We are all like the moon - we have our dark side.”* (Mark Twain)

(Or, “Uriah, you must be beat. Why don’t you head back to the house to see your wife? Bathsheba, isn’t that her name? I’ll bet she’s missed you. She’d probably love to see you. Go home. Take a break.”)

**[8b]...So Uriah left the king’s house, and a gift from the king was sent after him.**

Uriah was bound to be thinking, “*Man, this is weird. David calls me home from battle, and then he tells me to go see my loving wife.*”

If Uriah’s head was spinning, David’s mind was now at rest. Everything is going to be OK. Nobody will ever find out about his sin against Bathsheba.

Uriah will go home, sleep with his wife, claim the baby as his own, and no one will be the wiser. Except that... **[9]...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.**

The next morning, when David found out that Uriah hadn’t gone home, he panicked. His cover-up was coming apart at the seams.

*An honorable man (vv. 10-11)*

David called Uriah to the palace and demanded to know why he hadn’t gone home to be with his wife. (v. 10)

**[11] And Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Should I then go to my house to eat and drink and to sleep with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing.”**

Uriah refused the pleasures of home. Uriah the Hittite was walking in integrity. The king of Israel was not.

So, with his scheme foiled, will David finally face the music? Will he call Uriah aside, set things right, confess, and accept the consequences of his sin?

Again, no.

*An uncompromising man (vv. 12-13)*

The Bible tells us that David had Uriah stay in Jerusalem one more day. Then, after getting Uriah drunk, David sent Uriah off, staggering - and Uriah still did not go to his house. (vv. 12-13)

David tried and failed two times to beat the Law of the Harvest. And he still didn’t want to taste consequences.

Watch how far he is willing to go to avoid that meal.

### **Project “Cover-Up” (vv. 14-25)**

*Uriah carries his own death warrant (vv. 14-15)*

David sent Uriah back to the front lines, carrying a note to General Joab, confident that Uriah, loyal soldier that he was, would not read the note.

And he didn’t. He was an honorable man. Uriah had no idea that he was carrying his own death warrant.

Uriah traveled the forty miles to Rabbah, the Ammonite city that the Jewish army was attacking, and handed the note to Joab.

**[15] [David] had written in the letter the following, “Station Uriah on the front line of the fiercest battle and pull back from him, so that he may be struck and killed.”**

That note must have raised questions in Joab’s mind. But Joab had his orders, and he carried them out - to the letter.

*The despicable mission, accomplished (vv. 16-17)*

Joab placed Uriah in the battle in a hopeless position. Given that placement, it was inevitable that Uriah would die. He did, and his death was nothing other than cold-blooded murder. (vv. 16-17)

This plan to do away with Uriah worked because King David authored the plan. He wanted Uriah dead. And what the king wanted the king got.

*Report to the king (vv. 18-24)*

Very quickly, the news of Uriah's death made its way to David. (vv. 18-21) The second attempt at a cover-up worked. David now knows that he won't have a jealous husband coming after him.<sup>19</sup>

And if you have been disgusted with David's behavior thus far this morning, you'll be even more disgusted by his response to the news of Uriah's death.

**David's Cold-as-Ice Response (v. 25)**

***[25] Then David said to the messenger, "This is what you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another.'***

(My paraphrase: *"This is just how the cookie crumbles. These things happen. I guess it was just Uriah's time to go. It must have been God's will. We'll all miss good, ol' Uriah, but don't cry over spilled milk."*)

***"fight with determination against the city and overthrow it'; and thereby encourage him."***

To this point, we've seen the ugliest scenes in this drama. Here's the saddest.

**The Marriage of David and Bathsheba (vv. 26-27a)**

***[26] Now when Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for her husband.***

Don't miss this. Bathsheba loved her husband. This is unalloyed grief. Bathsheba is nothing but a victim in this whole sordid tale.

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<sup>19</sup> David committed murder here just as surely as if he had plunged a sword into Uriah's heart himself. The Ammonites were his "hit men."

She had been obeying God's Law when she was violated by the king who had the responsibility to uphold that Law.

David sent her back to her home in shame, only to discover weeks later that she was with child. So, the king - the father of the child - ruthlessly murdered her husband to protect his own reputation.

Then, after allowing a brief time for mourning,<sup>20</sup> David, the king who caused her misery, brought this grieving widow into his palace.<sup>21</sup>

***[27a] When the time of mourning was over, David sent servants and had her brought to his house and she became his wife; then she bore him a son...***

We come to the end of the story and wonder if David is going to get off scot-free. Will he face no consequences? The ominous last words of the chapter assure us that this story is far from over.

**Epilogue/Preview:**

***[27b]...But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord.*** - and we'll see where this story takes David next Sunday.

I'm sure that these have not been the most pleasant thirty minutes you've ever spent in church. Same here.

In recent weeks, we've come to respect and even to like David. We don't much like him right now.

And what a story this is. We wonder why in the world God would allow such a story in Scripture.

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<sup>20</sup> The usual mourning period was seven days, where a person is not expected to do anything but mourn.

<sup>21</sup> We know that David had more than one wife by this time. Michal and Abigail, and perhaps another woman named Ahinoam.

But the inclusion of this story in the Bible increases our respect and appreciation for the Bible. When the Bible tells the stories of its heroes, it tells the story, warts, and all.

And as ugly as this story is, there is something profound and redemptive for us, here.

We can learn lessons from David's misbehavior. Such as...

- *...idle hands are the devil's workshop.*  
David wouldn't have been tempted had he simply gone to battle with the army, as kings were supposed to do in the springtime.
- *...sin begets sin.*  
Having committed one sin (adultery), David was primed to commit more (murder) to avoid getting caught for the first one.
- *...sin is irrational.*  
Had David given thought to the damage his actions would do - to his own soul, to the woman, to his family - he never would have done it.
- *...cover-ups don't work.*  
Better to come clean after a failure. Better to confess and suffer the consequences, come what may. The Law of the Harvest always wins.

All of these - and more - are valuable what I'll call "sin-avoidance" lessons to take away from 2 Samuel 11.

But there is something else I'll point out now that I believe is more central to the point of the story.

It is the idea that the battle we wage when we are tempted to sin is a battle for sovereignty. *"Not Your way, Lord. I'll do it my way."*

The reason I say that is because of a word that shows up over and over again in this chapter. It is the Hebrew word *salech*. We translate that word, *sent*. It occurs eleven times - and that's a lot.

Just about every occurrence of the word involves David. He's either sending someone to do something or Joab is sending someone to do something at David's command.

David is the king. David is in charge. David is Israel's sovereign.

- David **sent** Joab and the army into battle. (v. 1)
- David **sent** servants to inquire about Bathsheba. (v. 3)
- David **sent** messengers to bring Bathsheba to the palace. (v. 4)
- David **sent** word to Joab to bring Uriah to Jerusalem. (v. 6)
- Joab **sent** Uriah to David, at David's command. (v. 6)
- David **sent** a gift for Uriah and Bathsheba to enjoy. (v. 8)
- David **sent** a letter to Joab consigning Uriah to death. (v. 14)
- Joab **sent** a messenger to tell David that his plot to kill Uriah had been successful. (vv. 18, 22)
- David **sent** servants to bring Bathsheba to the palace to become his wife. (v. 27)

David calls the shots. He does what he wants.

There is one glaring exception to this string of David "sendings." It appears early in the chapter. Bathsheba is the sender.

***[5] But the woman conceived; so she sent word and informed David, and said, "I am pregnant."***

Try as he might, the thing he was after here - to sin and get away with it, to sin with impunity - that, he couldn't have.

It turns out that David was not sovereign. He was not in control.

The First Law of the Universe is always in effect: There is a God, and it is not David. It isn't me. It isn't you.

David ugly story reveals that our battles with sin boil down to a matter of personal sovereignty.

Who's in charge?

We are not in charge. None of us are. We're not in life's driver's seat. We don't control the things that matter most to us. We're *out of*, not *in* control.

To lack control and to not know Jesus is the worst of all possible worlds.

To know Jesus means that despite not having control (that is the human condition), we still have a transcendent purpose in life. We are in a relationship with the One who is in control.

To not know Jesus is to not have control OR transcendent purpose or the abundant or the eternal life Jesus died to give us.

The good news is that the gift of eternal life is available to you today. You can never earn it and you don't deserve it. You can only receive it as a gift.

And the only One who can give you that gift is the one and only Sovereign: the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust Him who suffered the consequences for your sins on the cross and receive the free gift of eternal life today.

Then, the story of David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah also speaks powerfully to those who are, now, trusting Jesus for eternal life.

The story we've seen today shows what happens when a redeemed person - and David was certainly redeemed! - pursues personal sovereignty instead of submission to a sovereign Lord: A look leads to lust leads to sin leads to death.

David's refusal to submit to God brought disaster. It brought God's discipline. The same is true for us, today, who refuse to submit to Jesus' Lordship. We invite disaster AND His discipline.

In the end we will be glad for His discipline (see Hebrews 12:11), because the end of discipline is peace.

How much better, though, to decide this day that you will submit to God's loving, Sovereign Lordship.

To live in submission to the Lordship of Jesus is to enter into peace and joy, purpose and meaning, what He called the abundant life. (John 10:10)

David learned that lesson the hard way. His story offers every one of us the chance to learn it the smart way.