

Promises Broken  
2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-27; 12:1-10  
Matt 21:33-41

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2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-27; 12:1-10

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. 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, 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. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. 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. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

Matt 21:33-41

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'" So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Again we've skipped over some chapters, right to one of the most salacious stories of the Old Testament. King David is the great-grandson of Ruth. He's the same David as David and Goliath. He has grown up to be the greatest war king that the Hebrew people ever had. He has conquered all their neighbors, and even Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

After he conquers Jerusalem, David moves the capital of the Hebrews there. The Hebrew people have peace and prosperity. God is with David, and God is with the Hebrews. God promises David that his son will build God a house. God promises David that God's people will live securely. God promises David that his descendants will rule over God's people forever.<sup>2</sup> God does not require anything from David in exchange for this, and God does not break God's promises.

David lives a blessed life. He has a kingdom, and loyal friends. He has several beautiful wives, and many strong sons.

But at what point does God's blessing turn into David believing he's entitled to whatever he wants?

I didn't have Ginny read the whole story, because it would just be too long. But let's start at the beginning. David does not lead the army out to fight, which is the king's job. He stays behind in Jerusalem, and he gets bored. He's walking around on the flat roof of his palace, when he looks down and sees a beautiful woman bathing. She is not playing to an audience, real or imagined. She is simply cleaning her body. David finds out who she is. She's the wife of one of the officers of his army.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 5:6-10. Jerusalem was not originally a Hebrew city – it was a city that David conquered. The people who originally built it were called the Jebusites, and the Hebrew people let them live with them in Jerusalem even after they conquered it. (Joshua 15:63, Judges 1:21.)

<sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 7. This is referred to as the "Davidic covenant."

David sends for “the woman,” and he has sex with her, and he sends her away. David does not go to her. This is not a seduction, by either party. This is not a love affair. This is a powerful man old enough that he has adult sons of his own who sees a beautiful young woman and he decides to take her. If you are saying, “Ick,” good. That means you understand.

This is coveting his neighbor’s spouse, and worse.

David sends for her, and then he sends her away when he’s done. Bathsheba is not even named in this event. He treats her not as a human being, but as an object, to which he can do anything he likes. She does not have a choice here. David is the king: they both know that he could kill her in the middle of the public street and he would still be king.

This is adultery: both of them are married people. But let’s be real. This is rape. Bathsheba is not responsible for what happened, because she has no power to stop it. David is responsible.

Bathsheba gets pregnant from this rape, and she sends word to David.

David sends a messenger to bring Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba’s husband, back from the front. He then spends two days getting Uriah drunk and trying to get him to go home and sleep with his wife, so that he will believe that the child is his.<sup>3</sup> When that fails, David sends him back to the front with a letter to his commander. The letter orders the commander to abandon Uriah in the fiercest fighting. Uriah literally carries his own death warrant.

This is murder.

After Bathsheba has completed the formal mourning period for her husband, David sends for her. She becomes his wife, the latest of eight, and she bears him a son.

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<sup>3</sup> He knows what to do here, which makes me wonder if he has done this before.

God is displeased with all this, and with a leader who would do such a thing. God sends the prophet Nathan to David, and Nathan tells the king a story.

“There were two men in the same city, one rich, one poor. The rich man had a lot of livestock, but the poor man had nothing—just one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised that lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup—even sleep in his arms! It was like a daughter to him.

“Now a traveler came to visit the rich man, but he wasn’t willing to take anything from his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had arrived. Instead, he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the visitor.”

“David gets very angry at the man, and he says to Nathan, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, the one who did this is demonic! He must restore the ewe lamb seven times over because he did this and because he had no compassion.’

“You are that man!’ Nathan tells David. ‘This is what the Lord God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you from Saul’s power. ... Why have you despised the Lord’s word by doing what is evil in his eyes? You have struck down Uriah ... with the sword and taken his wife as your own. You used the Ammonites to kill him. Because of that, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah ... as your own, the sword will never leave your own house.’”<sup>4</sup>

David has broken several of the Ten Commandments here, and, what’s more, he has broken God’s Law by committing rape and by treating people, both Bathsheba and Uriah, like objects. He has no excuse.

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Samuel 12, Common English Bible.

God still keeps God's promises to David. And Scripture says that God forgives David. But David must still deal with the consequences of his actions. David has lived his whole life up until now with God's blessing. For the rest of his life, he does not enjoy that blessing. He suffers, and the Hebrew people suffer with him.

David and Bathsheba's child dies. David mourns, but then he goes to Bathsheba and he sleeps with her again. She bears a son, named Solomon. Bathsheba's fate here is one of those examples of how the world has gotten better since the days of the Old Testament. David murdered her husband and raped her. And she is forced to live in his house and be dependent on him for food and shelter and clothing. That was the best option available for her at that time. I would hope that, today, she would have better options.

Meanwhile, David is scrambling to prevent his general Joab from claiming all the credit for military victories.

With a role model like David and how he treated Bathsheba, David's oldest son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar, and David refuses to punish him. David's other son Absalom responds by killing Amnon. Absalom then starts a civil war against his father that ends with Absalom being killed.<sup>5</sup>

The entire rest of David's life is one disaster after another. There are plagues. There's another civil war. There's a famine. There's war with the Philistines. Even after David dies, the throne is disputed between his sons Solomon and Adonijah.

David's legacy is forever tarnished. All this because David was blessed, and he came to see that as license to treat other human beings like things. All this because David used the power God gave him not to serve God's people, but to exploit them.

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 18.

When Nathan tells King David his parable, David's eyes are opened, and he sees what he has done. He has treated Bathsheba and Uriah as being of less worth than he himself is. He has destroyed their lives. He didn't set out to destroy their lives, but he didn't seem to care if his actions had that effect. The result is the same as if he had set out to destroy this couple.

I wonder if David's story is a parable for us, in how we deal with other people.

I know that all of us have been given gifts for the benefit of God's work in the world.<sup>6</sup> None of us is a king, with life and death power over other people, but all of us have gifts.

I hope that none of us has raped someone and killed their spouse. But I'm reasonably sure that all of us deal with other people every day who do not have the particular gifts that we do. It's very easy to slip into seeing those people as less than we are, instead of seeing them as children of God just like we are. It's very easy to slip into seeing those people merely as obstacles to be overcome, or as children to be controlled, or as things to be manipulated.

Every time we treat another child of God as less than we are, we sin.

So, I'm going to ask you a question. No need to raise your hands, just think about the answer. "Are you that man?"

If you are, and to the degree that you are, follow David's lead. Say, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' That's not a statement of despair – it's a statement of hope! It is a statement of hope that the Lord God will forgive you.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 12.

Confess your sin, and see what you can do to fix it. As the kids found, you may not be able to completely fix it. But you can likely make it better, and you can certainly work to avoid doing it to someone else.

For that is how flawed, broken people like us can be part of the Kingdom of God in this world.

Thank God!

AMEN.