**David sins** 14/5/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 11, 1John 2:1-17

Text: 2Samuel 11

Psalms: 112, 139b:1-12, 51:1-12, 117

He was a long way from home in a foreign land. He was living among heathen people. He was the slave of an important man. That man’s wife lusted after this handsome young man: ‘Lie with me’ she demanded. The boss’s wife was seducing him. What was he to do? As it happened, he ended up in jail, but not before telling here, ‘How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God’ (Gen 39:9). That young man was Joseph of course, not David! That young man was a slave, not a king. But if what he was tempted to do was a sin against God, was it not the same for a king? Does God have different rules for different people?

At our recent Synod were reminded from the Larger Catechism that some sins are more heinous or serious than others: ‘From the persons offending; if they be of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others and whose example is likely to be followed by others’ (Westminster Larger Catechism Q151). Our Synod had disciplined a retired minister. David was king of Israel. He answered to no one, except God. He had lived an exemplary life as a young soldier, especially when on the run from King Saul. David was not sinless of course, but in what we have read thus far of his life only his anger towards Nabal and threat to kill him was potentially sinful; he also acted deceitfully towards a Philistine king.

The Lord had established David on the throne of Israel, giving him victory over his enemies on every side. We have seen how David prayerfully committed his way to the Lord, at least on the battlefield. He was eager to build a house for the Lord, although we have seen him stumble when it came bringing the ark to Jerusalem. David wrote many songs of worship, songs inspired by God, but when it came to reading the Bible he was not as diligent as he might have been. He had not read about transporting the ark? Had he not read about Joseph refusing to sin against the Lord by having sex with another man’s wife?

Chapter 11 of 2Samuel is among the best known in the Bible, particularly among Hollywood types. It is interesting that David’s sin is included in the Bible, in the life of the greatest king of Israel; it is not included in the account of David’s life given in the Book of Chronicles (see 1Chron 20). Apart from being a warning to us all, it explains the subsequent breakdown of order in David’s family. David was a man after God’s own heart, a man given the Spirit of the Lord. But still he lived with an earthly body in a fallen world and was subject to temptation. He lived as we all do, in the presence of sin. We do not attain perfection in this world. We will look at this chapter under three subheadings: ‘Commit adultery’, ‘Cover up sin’, and the terrible ‘Cost of sin’.

**1. Commit adultery**

‘Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death’ (James 1:14, 15). Was James analysing the behaviour of King David that afternoon in Jerusalem over one thousand years previously? The opening verse of this chapter explains it all! David was relaxing in his palace while his army was at war. It was spring, ‘a time when kings go out to battle’, but not so with this king. After the spring harvest, men were free to go to battle, and there was plenty of food about. Joab was leading Israel’s army in yet another battle with the Ammonites. He had their main city under siege. ‘But David remained at Jerusalem’ (11:1).

The weather was warming up so David took a nap in the afternoon. After getting up from his bed, he went to the roof of the palace to catch the evening breeze. While strolling around the roof he spotted a woman taking a bath in her backyard. The backyard would have been walled but had no roof so David could peer in from above. ‘The woman was very beautiful’ (11:2). David’s eyes focussed sharply on the body of this woman and he lusted after her in his heart. The lust of the eyes became the lust of the flesh (1John 2:16). The ‘pride of life’ also entered David’s heart because he, as king, was not content with containing that lust in his heart; he wanted that woman and he would have that woman.

David had more than seven wives and many concubines but he wanted this woman he saw bathing in her backyard. He did not know her name but he wanted her in his bed. He sent to find out and was told her name was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, and wife of Uriah the Hittite (11:3). She was another man’s wife! That information should have been the end of David’s fantasy. He knew the seventh commandment, ‘Do not commit adultery’. He knew that under the law adultery was punishable by death (Lev 20:10). His own son would later write, ‘Whoever commits adultery lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul’ (Prov 6:32).

But David was king and he got what he wanted, even another man’s wife. David knew he was accountable to the Lord but this truth was drowned as lust flooded his heart. He sent messengers to bring Bathsheba to his bedroom. He would have her, and with his lust satisfied he would send her home. No one would know, except his servants, and the Lord God of course! There is no mention of this woman protesting but let no one suggest she was complicit. She was a ‘nobody’ to the king- apart from her beautiful body! David was abusing his position of power, long before President Clinton, Harvey Weinstein, and not a few church leaders.

David thought he could get away with his ‘one-night-stand’, but the woman conceived, and she told David (11:5). She had just completed her monthly period of being unclean when David ‘took her’, so the child was not that of her husband, who was away at war (11:4). And so began David’s desperate attempt to cover up his sin. So far he had broken two of the Ten Commandments in coveting his neighbour’s wife and committing adultery. He was about to break two more, making it four out of ten!

**2. Cover up sin**

If David had been ‘discreet’ thus far in his affair with Bathsheba, his indiscretion would soon become public knowledge because she was pregnant with his child. He could have denied any contact with ‘that woman’ but she knew the truth and so did others. The easiest way to cover his sin was to get her husband home to spend the night with her. So David sent an urgent message to his army commander telling him to send Uriah the Hittite home, and he did (11:6). Uriah was a foreigner drafted into David’s elite forces. He was also a man of morals, a man who feared God. His conscience proves to be a challenge to David, and a shame upon him.

Uriah must have wondered why the king was calling him, but David simply asked about Joab and how the war was going (11:7). He then sent Uriah to his home to ‘wash his feet’, to relax and sleep with his wife (11:8). Ironically, David was relaxing and sleeping with women, including Uriah’s wife! David sent a gift, probably wine and food, so Uriah could really relax with his wife. If Uriah had gone home David would be off the hook; his sin would be covered up, at least in the eyes of the world.

But Uriah did not go home as David had planned. He slept with the servants at the palace gate (11:9). When David was told about Uriah sleeping with the servants he called him again, asking why he had not gone down to his wife. Uriah, and others, must have wondered why he was getting so much attention from the king but he does not reveal any suspicion towards David; after all, David was the king, the God-ordained, upright leader of the nation. What Uriah said to David must have cut him to the heart but repentance was a not on David’s mind. The ark and the army of Israel were dwelling in tents, so how could he, Uriah, go down to his house to eat and drink and lie with his wife: ‘I will not do this thing’ he swore before David (11:11). He understood what David intended, suspicion or no suspicion, but he could not be in his house with his wife when his comrades were camped out in the fields. What an indictment upon David!

David came up with another plan to get Uriah to go to his house and lie with his wife. He was desperate to cover up his sin. He told Uriah to wait another day or two before going back to the war. He also invited him to a palace party and got him drunk (11:13). He hoped that an inebriated Uriah would wander off to his house and to his wife. ‘But he did not go down to his house’ (11:13).

David was getting even more desperate. His clever plan to cover up his sin was not working. Uriah was proving to be more righteous than David. As king, David had a lot of power but he could not get this man to sleep with his wife! Yet there was something else he could do, something even more sinful than the sin he was trying to cover up. The thought of repentance had still not entered David’s mind or heart. Repentance does not come easily to respected leaders, be they king, business leader, or church leader. Cover-up continues to be the popular way of dealing with sin, but cover-up usually involves lies and deceit, and sometimes involves making innocent people pay for the sin. David was about to break two more commandments, the commands about false witness and murder.

**3. Cost of sin**

‘In the morning it happened that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah’ (11:14). He must have skipped his morning devotion that day! Unbeknown to Uriah, he was carrying his own death sentence. A completely innocent man was sentenced to death by King David; was this the same David who refused to harm the man trying to kill him, and who protested loudly when innocent men like Ishbosheth and Abner were so treacherously murdered? David would make Uriah’s murder look like an accident of war, but even Joab was careful not to make Uriah’s ‘accident’ look too obvious.

David asked Joab to put Uriah in the frontline and have everyone else draw back, leaving Uriah exposed. Joab put Uriah in the frontline but with other, apparently expendable, men. He sent them into a danger zone near the city wall. When the men of the city came out, or came up on the city wall to fight Joab, Uriah and some other men were shot and killed. Having obeyed the king’s orders, Joab sent a messenger to convey the news to David; although the death of soldiers other than Uriah might not have pleased the king. If David complained about Joab getting too near the city wall, like the foolish son of Gideon at Thebez, the messenger was to remind David that Uriah the Hittite was dead also (11:20-24).

David’s response to the news of Uriah’s death could hardly have been more callous and uncaring. He sent a message of encouragement back to Joab saying, ‘The sword devours one as well as another’ (11:25). He told Joab not to let the death of Uriah displease him, or literally, ‘be evil in your sight’ (11:25). But David was not the ultimate judge of what was evil. The chapter ends with the solemn words, ‘But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord’, or literally, ‘was evil in the eyes of the Lord’ (11:27).

This last verse contains the first mention of the Lord’s name in this tragic tale of lust, adultery, deception, and murder. When the Lord is displeased there will be consequences, especially in the absence of repentance. David was painfully brought to repentance in the next chapter. Thankfully, there can be restoration after repentance but there will still be consequences. After mourning her dead husband, probably for seven days, Bathsheba was brought by David to the palace to be his wife, and she bore him a son, but this was only the beginning of dysfunction, sin, and death that overcame the house of David.