**You are the man** 28/5/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 12, Psalm 51

Text: 2Samuel 12

Psalms: 32:1-7, 51:1-9, 38:1-7, 117

The text written on my calendar for this month reads: ‘He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy’ (Prov 28:13). These words were written by Solomon, David’s son. David himself could have written them after attempting to cover up his adultery. David took Uriah’s wife while her husband was away at war. When she became pregnant he desperately tried to cover up his sin. He brought Uriah home from the front so he could sleep with his wife, but he didn’t. David then called for Uriah to be killed in battle to cover up his sin. After committing one sin, it is not unusual for us to commit further sins as we try to cover up the first. The second sin is often ‘false witness’ or a lie, but may extend to physical action. From our youth we are taught, ‘Be sure your sins will find you out’, but we do not always listen. The Bible says, ‘You reap what you sow’ (Gal 6:7).

David was king, and kings think they can do what they like with impunity. Everyone bowed down to the king; no one dared speak against him, although Joab, his army commander, was also a powerful man. But even kings have to answer to God. The previous chapter ended with the ominous words: ‘But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord’ (11:27). When Bathsheba became a widow, David took her as his wife, but this was not the end of the matter of his sin. Sin always has consequences. The law of the Lord is perfect, so breaking this law leads to unpleasant consequences. In fact, the laws which David had broken carried the death penalty in his day. But who was going to tell David his sin? Who was going to deliver justice? Had David not succeeded in covering up his sin? His son had not yet written those words: ‘He who covers his sins will not prosper’.

The prophet Nathan appears on the scene as the Lord’s messenger. Our first subheading is, ‘Nathan’s parable’, our second, ‘Newborn dies’ and our third, ‘New name for Ammonite city’.

**1. Nathan’s parable**

As God’s prophet, Nathan was respected by the king, although it was not unknown for priests and prophets to be killed by the king. The prophet Samuel anointed David, just as we have seen a minister of the church anoint King Charles III- we no longer have prophets or priests. Prophets communicated the will of God, which is what ministers do when they preach from the Bible. Nathan communicated God’s will to David when he asked about building a house for the Lord (7:2f). But David did not consult Nathan when it came to covering up his sin; he did this all by himself!

Nathan went to speak with David because the Lord sent him (12:1). It is not easy to speak to a person about their sin, especially when that person has the power to throw you into prison or worse. But when the Lord sends, we must go; no man is more powerful than the Lord. Even so, Nathan was very tactful in confronting King David. He did not actually confront the king about his sin; he spoke a parable which moved David to condemn himself. This is the power of God’s word. It is God’s word, not our words, that has the power to convict men and women of their sin (2Tim 3:16, Heb 4:12). A knowledge of psychology may help us in understanding a sinner but does not help when it comes to dealing with their sin.

Nathan came to David and told him a story about two men, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had huge flocks and herds, while the poor man had but one animal; not a sheep but a lamb, and not just a lamb but a ewe lamb (12:3). This little lamb was so precious to him that he brought it into his house to be nursed and to eat with him and his children: ‘It was like a daughter to him’ (12:3). One day a traveller came to stay at the rich man’s house. So what did the rich man do when it came to giving this visitor a meal? Did he go and get a lamb from one of his flocks? No! He went and took the poor man’s pet lamb to put on his table for the visitor.

Hearing this story, David felt pity for the poor man, and condemned the rich man for his lack of pity. He told Nathan that this rich man deserved to die for what he had done (12:5, 6). He must repay the poor man fourfold for his callous theft, as demanded by the law (Exod 22:1). As king, David often made judgments on cases brought before him. This hypothetical case brought by Nathan was easy to judge. The rich man was clearly guilty of having no pity in taking the poor man’s lamb, a lamb he loved like a daughter.

The prophet turned to David and solemnly declared, ‘You are the man’ (12:7). A sword pierced David’s heart as Nathan explained to him how the Lord had anointed him king, and delivered him from the hands of Saul. The Lord established David on the throne of Israel and Judah, giving Saul’s wives into his keeping (12:8). Remember Ishbosheth accusing Abner of going into Saul’s concubine- a serious matter in those days (3:7). Saul had only one wife that we know about, and one concubine. His wife was David’s mother-in-law of course.

The Lord was pointing out to David that he had richly blessed him, and would have given him even more, but David forgot these blessings. The lust of the eyes and of the flesh drove him to desire more, to desire what the Lord clearly prohibited. The Lord accused David of despising his commandments by bullying and murdering Uriah the Hittite and taking his wife. He had blood on his hand, even if his sword was clean (12:9).

David was guilty of breaking the six and seventh commandments, commandments about murder and adultery. Under the law, the penalty for breaking either was death. Wisely, David repented of his sin, and the Lord in his grace ‘put away his sin’ and declared, ‘You shall not die’ (12:13). What would have happened if David had continued covering up his sin, even before the Lord? It is only when we confess our sin that the Lord graciously forgives us: ‘If we say we have not sinned, we make Him [God] a liar’ (1John 1:8, 9). David confessed before Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord’ (12:13). In Psalm 51 we also hear David confessing his sin and crying to the Lord for mercy. David appeals to the Lord on the basis of his covenant love.

Forgiveness of sin means the Lord had ‘put away your sin’, or covered your sin (12:13); His covering your sin is different to your attempting to cover it! In the psalms we read of the Lord putting our sin behind his back, or removing our sin as far as the east if from the west (Ps 103:12). Sin separates us from the Lord, but when he forgives us that separation ceases. Still, sins have their consequences with regard to our life here on earth.

David’s sin gave ‘great occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme’ (12:14). They might say, ‘Look at the God of Israel tolerating David’s sin; how righteous is that?’ In every culture murder is seen as evil, and often as punishable by death. If the heathen saw David getting away with murder they would have taken a very low view of his God’s justice. David himself was outraged at the rich man taking the poor man’s lamb, saying he deserved to die. Thankfully, the Lord is more merciful than we are, but still sin has its consequences.

Declaring the word of the Lord, Nathan said, ‘Now therefore’, after accusing David of doing evil in the eyes of the Lord (12:10). He declared the following consequences. Firstly, the sword, meaning death, will never depart from David’s house. Peace will no longer exist within David’s family. How many families are broken and dysfunctional because of sin of one or more of its members? Adultery and/ or divorce is a sure way of driving peace from a family.

Secondly, one from within David’s house would rise up against him. And thirdly, this ‘neighbour’ would lie with David’s wives in broad daylight (12:11). David’s son, Absalom, conspired against him and briefly took over the palace. He showed contempt for David by lying with his concubines on the roof of the palace (16:22). What David had done in secret would be done by his son in the open.

**2. Newborn dies**

The sword would strike David’s family without delay. Nathan’s last words to David were, ‘The child who is born to you shall surely die’ (12:14). The son born to David by Uriah’s wife would become ill (12:15). While the newborn lay in its crib desperately ill, David fasted and pleaded with the Lord for this child. He lay on the ground refusing food, even when urged by the elders to eat something. After just seven days, the child died. Everyone was too scared to tell David, thinking he might mourn so deeply as to do something desperate (12:18). David noticed them whispering and asked if the child had died.

Upon learning that the child had died, David got up and washed, put on clean clothes, and went into the house of the Lord to worship (12:20). He then went home and asked for food. His servants thought this very strange behaviour. When a loved one dies most people go into mourning, putting on sackcloth and ashes and not eating anything. They like to show respect for the dead I suppose, but David’s response is more theologically sound! He explained that while the child was alive he wept and fasted and prayed, knowing that the Lord was powerful to heal, and hoping that he would graciously do so. ‘But now he is dead; why should I fast?’ asked David (12:23). The newborn had passed from this world and would not return, not within David’s lifetime anyway. What David believed was that he would go to him (12:23).

David did not simply mean that he would join him in the grave. David believed that at death the Lord’s people go to be with him. He believed what is written in the Shorter Catechism Q37: ‘The souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection’. Is this what you believe? It is not wrong to mourn the death of a loved one, but let us not mourn like those who have no hope (1Thess 4:13).

Bathsheba, now called David’s wife, would have been distraught at the death of her newborn, but we are not told any of her feelings in this sorry, sinful saga brought upon her by King David. David comforted her, and the Lord blessed her with another son called Solomon (12:24). This name may be derived from the word ‘*shalom*’, meaning peace. But the Lord had declared that David’s house would not be one of peace. Still, the Lord loved this child, who as we know, succeeded David as king of Israel. The Lord called him ‘Jedidiah’ which means ‘beloved of the Lord’ (12:25), ‘a final symbol of God’s forgiveness in the lives of David and Bathsheba’.

**3. New name for Ammonite city**

The sorry saga of David’s adultery began with him strolling around the roof of his palace when he should have been out leading his army. He sent Joab to lead the army against the Ammonites, who had rebelled yet again. The war was costly for Uriah the Hittite, and for other men, but Joab was about to take the royal city in Ammon. He sent a message to David telling him to get himself to the frontline quickly if he wanted the honour of capturing and renaming this city (12:28). He was probably fed up with doing David’s dirty work!

David wasted no time in joining the siege of Rabbah with more men. They took the city, along with lots of plunder, including the crown of their king, who presumably was killed; although most of the enemy were taken as prisoners and put to work building bricks and bridges and the like (12:31). The captured crown was pure gold, studded with precious stones. It weighed a talent of gold, equal to about 34kg (12:30). It is suggested that David did not wear this crown for very long, but it was important to symbolise David’s victory over this enemy. Do you know the weight of the crown that was carefully placed on the head of King Charles III? About 2.23kg!

The chapter ends with David back where he belonged, namely leading the army of Israel and taking responsibility for the nation of God’s people. This victory however, will be the last David’s sees for a long time. He had stumbled badly, and his family would suffer the consequences of his sin, according to the word of the Lord, but he did not fall. David repented, and the Lord in his grace forgave him. When you repent of your sin the Lord will graciously forgive you also!