



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for February 8, 2009
Released on Wednesday, February 4, 2009**

"Commitment to Confront"

Lesson Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 13-15.

Background Scripture: 2 Samuel 11:1-12:15.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 51:1-9.

2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 13-15

1 And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

2 The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

3 But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

4 And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

7a And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

.....

13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

15 And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Retell the story of Nathan's rebuke of David.
2. Explain why the method of Nathan's rebuke is or is not a model of Christian rebuke today.
3. Write a prayer that acknowledges God's awareness of all he or she does.

Introduction

Confronting Leadership

Many years ago I was involved in an interim ministry that brought me into a circle of leaders of a small but influential church. I was enjoying my preaching ministry with this church until the day came that I received a phone call from one of the church's leaders. A fellow leader, an elder in the church, stood accused by the police of "bad behavior" in a public restroom. Others were involved, and it was all caught on videotape. There had to be a confrontation.

Two other leaders and I went to the home of the accused elder. Though we could not see the videotape ourselves, the facts were confirmed by a detective. We expected a confession from this person, and we were prepared to help this individual through the difficulty with prayer, counseling, and forgiveness. He would be given a chance to overcome whatever triggered the "bad behavior."

But there was no confession. In fact, just the opposite occurred. The person denied the accusation by the police. He then began to accuse us of overstepping our boundaries with regard to his personal life. After a couple of hours of heated discussion with no confession or hope of receiving one, we had to ask for the person's resignation. We requested that he cease all leadership activities in the church.

We still offered hope for that person should he change his mind about confessing. He did not. The sad part of this story is that within a few years this individual died of a disease. To my knowledge he never confessed to anyone. Hopefully he made peace with God, but certainly there was no reconciliation with the church family.

The above scenario has been repeated many times in the churches where I have served. I have discovered that confronting a leader is difficult and not always successful. Yet it must be done, since leaders are to be "blameless" (Titus 1:7), "of good behavior" (1 Timothy 3:2), and "have a good report of them which are without" (1 Timothy 3:7).

Nathan was called by God to be a prophet to the dynasty of David. In fact, Nathan had given David good news about his dynasty that it would last "for ever" (2 Samuel 7:16). But later Nathan had to confront David with an accusation. This confrontation is the subject of today's lesson.

Lesson Background

At the time of today's lesson, the Israelite army was fighting against the Ammonites. The date was about 990 BC. The particular part of the war that is a backdrop for us is a siege of the Ammonite capital, Rabbah. This was located at the site of the modern city of Amman, Jordan. Situated at the sources of the Jabbok River, the city was about 40 miles east of Jerusalem. The Ammonites were distantly related to Israel by means of Lot's younger daughter (Genesis 19:38).

With a good general directing his army, a king could stay home to take care of administrative concerns or personal matters. David had such a man in Joab. He was a fierce and unrelenting warrior, at that time very loyal to David. Thus David could stay home during the war.

One day while home, David seemed to have enjoyed a nap on the roof (compare 1 Samuel 9:25). After waking, he began to walk around the roof, perhaps enjoying the cool breeze as he looked over his city (2 Samuel 11:2).

The highest point of the city was, of course, Mount Zion, upon which the tent of the ark of the covenant was placed. (Solomon would later build the temple on that spot.) Next to the mount on the south side was David's palace. Thus, David's palace rooftop would have been the second highest position overlooking the small city of David (probable size: about 2,000 people within 12 acres). This is how David could have observed activity on a nearby rooftop (2 Samuel 11:2b).

What David saw was a woman (Bathsheba) performing a ritual bath for purification (see 2 Samuel 11:4; compare Leviticus 15:19-24). David may have

known Bathsheba's family, for her father was Eliam (2 Samuel 11:3), one of David's "mighty men" (23:34) and the son of one of David's counselors (see 15:12; 16:23).

King David's notice of Bathsheba quickly turned to lust. He ended up committing adultery. The adultery resulted in a pregnancy (11:5). So David ordered that Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, be placed in a position that would result in his death. Then David took Bathsheba as his own wife.

Before that, David had tried to influence Uriah a couple of times to go to his own house before returning to battle. That way everyone (except David and Bathsheba) would think that the baby was Uriah's. But Uriah's sense of honor kept him from spending time with his wife (11:6–13). Little did Uriah know that it was his sense of honor that sealed his fate (11:14–17), as he carried his own death warrant back to Joab.

The hypocrisy of the report of Uriah's death and David's equally hypocritical response (11:18–25) only made the affair more disgusting to Yahweh God: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (11:27b). Thus, God used His prophet Nathan to confront David.

The Confrontation (2 Samuel 12:1-6)

1. What incident in David's life caused the confrontation in today's lesson text? (2 Samuel 12:1a)

Many Christians are familiar with today's story. Second Samuel 2:11 shows us David's greatest moral failure. This scripture describes his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the following murder of her husband when she became pregnant.

The fact that the baby is already born by this point means that God waits several months before sending *Nathan* to confront *David*. Nathan is a prophet of the court (2 Samuel 7). Such prophets have ready access to the king, but their commitment can involve unpleasant and dangerous tasks. Prophets can be dismissed, imprisoned, or even put to death for telling the king what he does not want to hear (1 Kings 22:1–18; Jeremiah 26:7–9, 20–23). But when the Lord sends you, you go!

2. How did Nathan's parable fit in with the culture of his day, thus making it a realistic story (vs. 1b, 2)?

The godly prophet is always an advocate for justice and truth. Thus it is not out of character for Nathan to present a tale of injustice to the king for his consideration. The story definitely catches David's attention, as we shall see. Whether David views it as a parable or a real story, he is engaged in thinking it through.

Nathan related that "there were two men in one city;... one rich, and the other poor." The description of *the rich man* is completed with very few words. Quite simply, this is a guy who has much more than he needs. Yet one should be careful here. It is not a sin to be rich. What happens to the rich is that in their abundance they may become arrogant and exhibit a sense of superiority over those with lesser means. Money or riches become power. And power corrupts. How well the poor understand this because they are the victims of the abuse of power by the rich.

The rich, on the other hand, hardly see themselves in this light. They are innocent of any crime, for they have "worked hard" for their wealth. That outlook can be true, but rationalizing certain methods for obtaining wealth is very easy!

3. What was the situation of the poor man (v. 3)?

The focus of the story is on the situation of *the poor man*. He has no significant material possessions except *one little ewe lamb*. That's all he has, and he cherishes the little animal. It has grown up with *his children* and has become part of the family, as any pet lover understands.

By contrast, the animals that are in the “flocks and herds” of the rich man are not pets. They are no more than business assets to him. Were he to lose 25 or 50 percent of them, he may get angry. But his reaction would not be that of sadness over a lost relationship.

4. How did Nathan continue his parable? (v. 4)?

Nathan went on to say “there came a traveler came unto the rich man.”

We know from other biblical records that hospitality was of supreme importance in that culture (examples: Genesis 18:1–8 and Judges 13:15). Therefore, the rich man decided to provide his visitor with a meal. But instead of running to his own flock to find a lamb, he takes *the poor man’s* pet *lamb*! (We remember that David “took” the wife of Uriah; 2 Samuel 11:4.)

Apparently the rich man has such power that he had no problem taking with impunity what truly belongs to the poor man. Then a complete stranger eats the meat of the beloved pet. Nathan’s words are carefully chosen.

Nathan’s parable was told in such a way that anyone listening would have been drawn into the story, eliciting the emotional response he intended. He was taking a risk; however, because it was the king he was drawing into his verbal trap. A person does not rebuke a king without placing himself in a risky position. Nathan had been sent by God, however. So he knew he had to proceed boldly.

5. What did David angrily declare should be done against the rich man (vs. 5, 6)

When David heard the end of Nathan’s story, he knew that a despicable deed had been done—one that deserved the harshest of punishments.

David takes the bait! The hook sinks deeply into *David’s* own mouth as he utters words of moral outrage, even with an oath—“as the Lord liveth.” The rich *man* deserves to *die*, but at a minimum he must restore *fourfold*. This reveals that David knows the law of God (see Exodus 22:1; compare Luke 19:8). But knowledge of the law does not always translate into obedience to that law, as David’s reprehensible behavior demonstrates thus far.

As a bit of speculation, perhaps David sees in this rich man what he bitterly hates in himself: abuse of power, greed, lust, scorn for the rights (and even the lives) of others. That has been his life for several months. It is in this light that David indicts and sentences at the same time.

What David most hates is the fact that the rich man has “no pity.” David, who is declared to be a man after God’s own heart, rages against a rich man he considers to be heartless. Little does David realize that he has just indicted and sentenced himself!

6. What does Nathan accuse David of (v. 7a)?

Imagine David’s shock when he heard Nathan’s next words: “Thou art the man.” Nathan accused David of being the man in the parable. Until that moment, David had no realization whatever that Nathan had been portraying him. He was completely involved in the story Nathan told, and he responded just as Nathan had hoped he would. David condemned himself, and there was now no way for him to reverse the situation. He was trapped completely and had no route of escape.

Nathan’s commitment to God is confirmed in this statement. Nathan’s life is on the line, for he is confronting a king who is a recent murderer. If David is willing to have one of his most loyal soldiers (Uriah) killed to cover adultery, why not also kill a prophet who offers personal insult?

In verses 7b–12 (not in today's text), Nathan demonstrates the Lord's full knowledge of the situation. The criticism of David is relentless. Nathan has made his choice. Now it is time for David to make his.

The Response (2 Samuel 12:13-15)

7. What was David's response to Nathan and God's response to David? (v. 13)

We may compare David's response to Nathan with King Saul's response to Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:20, 21. When confronted with wrongdoing, Saul made excuses. David, on the other hand, admits his wrongdoing when confronted. A longer version of David's confession is found in Psalm 51.

Back in verse 5, David had condemned the rich man's behavior as worthy of death. Yet the Lord in His mercy has decided that David will *not die*.

8. How does our treatment of people affect our relationship with God?

David committed adultery with Uriah's wife and then arranged for Uriah's death, but said, "I have sinned against the Lord." John wrote, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). God takes our relationships with each other very seriously! All evil done to others dishonors Him because each is created in His image.

9. What was the result of David's actions (vs. 14, 15)?

While David's confession brings him personal forgiveness, the course of events his choices set in motion remains unchanged. The most immediate consequence will be the death of David and Bathsheba's first *child*. Further, the Lord proclaims to David (through Nathan) that "the sword shall never depart from thine house.... Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine house" (2 Samuel 12:10, 11).

The effect of David's behavior reaches far beyond himself and those close to him. His actions bring shame to the Lord by giving *the enemies* of God *occasion to blaspheme*. We do well to remember that there is a difference between *forgiveness* and *freedom from consequences*. To be forgiven (either by the Lord or by a person) does not necessarily mean that all consequences are wiped out.

10. What do we usually ignore about the consequences of our sins (worth repeating)?

We must remember that though God forgives us for our sins, the natural consequences for our sins remain. For example, a person who commits sexual immorality still risks having a baby. God will forgive the act, but that won't stop a child from being born. In addition, our sins not only affect ourselves, but those around us as well. The sinner often takes innocent bystanders with him or her. This may not seem fair, but this is the result from sin. We must avoid sin; not only for our sakes, but for the sake of those we love as well.

Conclusion

Ancient Egyptian pharaohs considered themselves to be divine and thus answerable to no one. Mesopotamian kings were not much better, thinking that they had at least semidivinity bestowed upon them. Israel's kings were different. Even before the beginning of the institution of kingship, Israel's kings were to be subject to God and God's laws as much as the people were (see Deuteronomy 17:14–20; 1 Samuel 12:14).

Keeping an Israelite king in line with God's will was primarily the work of the prophet. Samuel played that role for Saul. Nathan played that role for David.

Nathan's commitment to God's Word and will required him to confront David on the most grievous of sins. David's response of confession and submission was partly due to Nathan's skill in approaching the king. This story should teach us who lead in the church today about the need to confront.

We also must realize that our behavior affects the efforts of the church to win the lost. Sin always affects not only our relationship with God but also our relationships with others (see Galatians 6:1-5).

Prayer

Father, have mercy upon us according to Your loving-kindness. We acknowledge our sins and transgressions committed in Your presence. Create in us clean hearts and right spirits. With the restoration of the joy of our salvation, we will help others to acknowledge You in confession and repentance. Accept our broken and contrite hearts. In the name of the Holy One, Jesus. Amen.

Thought to Remember

God can use a repentant heart.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

The book of Esther is a very interesting short story in the Bible. Study Esther 4:1-3, 9-17 "**Risky Commitments**" this week. Pay attention to the faith in God described in 4:14-16. God preserved His people in that ancient time, and He will do so today.

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