

2 Samuel 12

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[0 : 00] Often when someone has done the wrong thing, they become anxious about being exposed. And with very good reason, it is a painful thing to be exposed, to be shown for who you are or for your actions or decisions to be revealed to others when those actions or decisions may be foolish.

And the pain of exposure is one of the reasons why people spend so much time and so much energy trying to cover up their failures and their sins. Just like we saw last week in chapter 11, David trying to cover up.

And our media, and we live in an age, don't we, that thrives on exposure. Sometimes the stories that the media run are sordid and unnecessary, but sometimes they're in the public interest too, aren't they?

We see it all the time. The Me Too movement. Think of the exposure of someone like Harvey Weinstein or Rolf Harris, Jeffrey Epstein.

Acts committed in secret now brought into the public view as they should be. And I can't imagine when those men found out that suddenly all was about to be revealed, it was a very easy time for them.

[1 : 25] Some more difficult for the victims, of course. But nevertheless, being exposed is very painful. And I think, if you're honest tonight, in less shocking ways, you and I have experienced those moments, perhaps.

Maybe it was when we were a child and a parent or a teacher called us out, no matter how impressive our lives were to us. The adults in our lives could see right through them. But maybe as an adult, you've committed some great mistake and it's been revealed to others. Some sin has come out.

A significant relationship maybe in the workplace. You're browsing history on the internet. Perhaps a struggle in your personal life. It is painful to be exposed.

But sometimes it is the very best thing for us. And that's how it proved to be with King David. In chapter 12, the great sins of chapter 11 are exposed.

[2 : 32] And as a result, chapter 12 describes what would have been a very, very painful chapter in David's life. And yet, the exposing of David proves to be a necessary step in bringing David to repentance and grace.

And so I want to remind you of the aftermath of David's sin. And I think the shocking and destructive nature of the sins of chapter 11. I think aftermath is right.

Chapter 12, can you notice, it begins with the Lord's initiative. And that itself is very significant.

Chapter 11, we saw that David was the one giving all the instructions. David was the one taking all the initiative.

But here in chapter 12, it is God's turn to do the talking. And David's turn to listen. And even the key verb that's used in verse 1 of chapter 12 underlines that.

So can you see it? The Lord sent Nathan to David. Do you remember in chapter 11, that word comes up again and again. And David sent off his armies.

[3 : 37] David sent to find out about Bathsheba. David sent to get Bathsheba. David sent word to Joab to send Uriah. And then he sent Uriah back to the battle.

And he sent a letter to Joab. And eventually, he sent for Bathsheba that she would be brought to him and become his wife. And so David is in control in chapter 11. He's doing all the sending.

But suddenly, God has turned up. And he is in control. And he sends Nathan to David. And this is a terrifying initiative. We've just learned.

Do you remember at the end of chapter 11, just see that last little phrase, the last line, the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. And there's a great sense of foreboding, isn't there?

About what David is in for. And yet, there's also great mercy here. Because God could have walked away at this point. Do you remember when the Lord's patience ran out with Saul, he just stopped sending the prophet Samuel to him.

[4 : 41] Silence and withdrawal, they are the ultimate judgment from the Lord. And so the fact that God still wants to talk to David after everything he's done, must be attributed to God's faithfulness.

And his love for David. So the prophet Nathan turns up, he speaks to David, and he doesn't do what we might expect. He doesn't launch into a stinging rebuke. He knows how resistant a hard, sinful heart can be.

Instead, David comes with a subtler strategy. He doesn't come to David and accuse him of committing adultery right out right. He tells him a story. And it's a story about a rich man and a poor man.

It's a story about a poor and a vulnerable man. It's a story about how the powerful rich man took advantage of his power and stole from the vulnerable poor man.

He stole his little lamb whom he loved. He killed the lamb and he ate it with a guest. Rather than eat one of his own lambs. And it's a story that very cleverly exposes the anatomy of David's sin.

[5 : 58] And we noticed, didn't we, it's not just adultery. As terrible a sin as adultery is, this is adultery committed by a very powerful man. Taking advantage of a more vulnerable man.

Stealing from him the person that he loves more than anyone else in the world. That's the way adultery works.

And many other sexual sins. Never believe that adultery is just affecting you too. It has an impact much wider.

It impacts others. And it's very striking, I think, that when the Apostle Paul speaks against sexual sin in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. He describes it, amongst other things, as a failure of brotherly love.

Let me read to you 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 3. For this is the will of God, that you abstain from sexual immorality. That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who do not know God.

[7 : 16] And so, for God has not called us for impurity, but holiness. And so, yes, David failed to love Bathsheba as he should.

And yes, he wronged her. But what Nathan's story emphasises is that he wronged Uriah. He took advantage of Uriah. And we know that in the end he stole Uriah's life.

And the story that Nathan tells us about David's horrendous sins, well, we learn in verse 5, don't we, that Nathan's story has its desired effect.

So, David, can you see him in verse 5? He is outraged. It's possible that David thought this was a true story about events which just happened in his kingdom.

And how he was going to have the opportunity to make this great wrong right. Or maybe he thought it was a hypothetical and he's just giving his opinion.

[8 : 16] But in any event, he is furious, isn't he? Look at verse 5. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. And he said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, this man who has done this deserves to die.

And he shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing. And because he had no pity. David passes a judgment that was very consistent with the Old Testament law.

But you see, he says way more than that. Because of the cruelty and the heartlessness of the crime that he's just heard about in the story, David feels that this powerful man actually deserves death.

Ironically, the death penalty was what the Old Testament prescribed for adulterers. And in this way, David has spoken without realising about what he himself deserved for his own sin.

He's about to find out. And he's about to discover that his outrage was actually directed towards himself. In verse 7, God breaks his silence and delivers the verdict.

[9 : 27] Again, through the prophet Nathan. And he begins by actually outlining the context in which David sinned. And he points out that David's sin is so much worse because God had given him everything he could possibly want or need.

So, verse 7. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul.

And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if that were too little, I would add to you as much more. How David's heart must have sunk when he heard those words.

You are the man. And when he realised that the powerful man in Nathan's story was actually him, how exposed he must have felt. And I imagine it was at that point that the shame of what he'd done began to wash over him.

Especially as he heard about God's kindness to him. And God has not finished speaking yet because he then describes how he sees David's sin and he describes it in two very significant ways.

[10:37] He uses the word despise. Listen up for the two uses of the word as I read to you verses 9 and 10. Why have you despised the word of the Lord?

To do what is evil in his sight. You've struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and you've killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore, the sword will never depart from your house because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

Can you just see the little difference that's there? The first use of the word despise. You despised, verse 9, the word of the Lord.

Verse 10, you despised me. So can you just see what David is saying there? In despising, what Nathan is saying there. In despising God's word.

Because the sin that David had committed was clearly against God's word. Clearly against the commandments. It's not as if he didn't know what he was doing. It was evil in the Lord's sight.

[11:48] He knew God's word, but he despised it. And what God reminds him, and what, when he reminds us also, that when we do that, it is personal.

It is not just the word. It is God's word. It is not just the Bible. It is God's Bible. It is his message to us. And so when we despise his word, we despise us. We despise him.

And when we reject and ignore his word, we reject and ignore him. It's always that way in relationships, isn't it? Always that way. Because if you ignore what someone says, or you reject what they say, then you are ignoring or rejecting him.

It's personal. And it has relational consequences. And so it was here between David and God. Yes, David had sinned against Bathsheba.

And yes, David had sinned against Uriah. But ultimately, David had sinned against God. And if David was outraged when he heard Nathan's story, how much more justified is God in being outraged?

[12:56] At the way David has treated him. And so David had to face the music. Verse 11, this is what the Lord says. Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house.

And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour. And he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun. For you did it secretly. But I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.

He says that there's going to be consequences and implications. And 2 Samuel will tell us much of that story.

And so the Lord has spoken. And then in verse 13 David speaks. And they are words of repentance. And according to the author of 2 Samuel, he speaks only a few words.

But I think there's something in the brevity of his speech that underlines the fact that he is not making excuses for himself. There's no qualifications here.

[14:00] There are no long-winded explanations. There is just an acknowledgement. And the acknowledgement is that his sin is against God. He's not just admitting that his sin was against Uriah and Bathsheba.

But that he did despise the Lord's word. And therefore he despised God. Despite the brevity that's recorded here.

We also know, don't we, that David expressed his repentance with many more words in Psalm 51. We're going to sing it later. That famous psalm is written in the aftermath of Nathan's confrontation with him.

And it's a wonderfully humble and eloquent confession. But even if we didn't have Psalm 51 to fill out what's in David's heart, we're left in no doubt in 2 Samuel 12 that Nathan's story has done its work.

David has been exposed. And he can see that he has sinned. And he can see that his sin is great. This week, after last week's sermon, I was asked the question, how can we reconcile the events of chapter 11 and David being a man after God's own heart?

[15:17] And I think it's here, at this moment, in chapter 12 and verse 13, that shows us why David is different to Saul. Before him.

And he's different from men who come after him as well. It's not, of course, to minimize his sin, but it is to acknowledge that what is close to God's heart is repentance of sin.

I read a quote from a writer who addresses that very question. And this is what he says. He says, To be the man after God's own heart is not to be sinlessly perfect, but to be, among other things, utterly submissive to the accusing word of God.

Do you notice Nathan's supply is swift and the Lord's forgiveness is made really clear. Verse 13. David said to Jonathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, The Lord also has put away your sin.

You shall not die. Though he deserved to die, he would not. He will not be given the penalty prescribed in the Lord. That is mercy.

[16:29] And it should shock us. It is an incredible thing that God says to him here. And we mustn't gloss over it as if it's the expected thing. Yes, we know God is gracious, but we mustn't take it for granted.

One of the books I was reading this week described the difference between vending machine grace and miracle grace. You know what a vending machine is? You go, you put your money in, and you get the product.

By vending machine grace, the author meant this expectation that can grow in Christian people that this is just what God does. You know, we put in our prayer of confession in the coin slot, and out comes the forgiveness we selected.

And we can become so used to forgiveness that we think nothing of it. But miracle grace is what grace always is. It's a miracle. It never ceases to be astonishing.

It never ceases to be undeserved. It's the sort of thing that should shock us. Make our jaws drop. Put goosebumps on our souls.

[17:42] That is the kind of grace that David received. But you notice, it is not just a case of David getting away with what he's done. He is forgiven, yes.

But he must also submit to the discipline of the laws. And just because there is grace, it doesn't mean that there are no implications. Having the penalty for sin removed is wonderful, isn't it?

But it's not the same thing as having the consequences of sin removed. Let me read to you from the second half of verse 13. The Lord has also put away your sin.

You shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you've utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die. The death of David's son is the subject of the next ten verses.

David's little boy becomes very ill and David wrestled with the Lord in prayer. He pleads with him to spare the child's life. And yet he knew his God was gracious and that grace encouraged him to intercede.

[18:51] But though God is gracious, it does not mean that he always answers our prayers in the way that we would like. And this was one of those times in David's life, as is often the case, where our prayers do not lead to the answers that we seek.

It's hard to know what God's purposes are here. It's hard to know why God would allow this innocent child to suffer for David's sin. Is God simply trying to teach David that there are consequences of our sins, especially in this area, for our families?

Is he wanting David to learn what it is to be powerless, just like Uriah was powerless? Is he trying to suggest that David's son was substituted for him in the same way that the Son of God may be substituted for many?

I don't claim to know. But what we do know is that David lost his son. And by the end of verse 23, there's nothing he can do about it. There's no way that he can bring him back. There's that beautiful promise, isn't there, for covenant children.

One day I shall go to him in death. But David's son will not be returned to him. And on this occasion, such is the discipline of the Lord.

[20:10] And interestingly, in the last few verses of the chapter, they describe David's life after this great grief. We read his wife comforts him.

They have another son who will end up succeeding David Solomon. And David's military campaigns continue, and the Lord gives to him victory. And I think there, there's just a number of those things that are sure and small signs of the Lord's blessing on David.

Even after his sin. I think that's why those verses are there. Yes, there is sin, and yes, there is discipline. But God's grace means that he does not hold out on his people.

Even the worst of sinners. He continues to feel kindly with them. He won't hold back the blessings of family life. The blessing of military victory for David.

And no doubt David's grief remained. But this chapter tells us that life goes on. And in the midst of a lifetime's painful memories, there still would be many things to thank God for.

[21 : 25] So what are we to make of this? I think this chapter helps us in a number of ways. It reminds us, this is what life is like in a fallen world.

A world in which we sin, and a world in which people around us sin. As I finish this evening, and as we come to the table, I want to point out to you three things that we see in this chapter.

Three consequences. Firstly, the consequences of sin, and then the consequence of repentance, and then finally the consequence of grace. Firstly, the consequences of sin. I don't know about you, but my overall impression is this is a dark chapter.

And yes, I know that David repents, and I know that David is forgiven, but the bulk of the chapter is really spent describing the horror and consequences of David's sin.

And it's very sobering, and I think it's particularly sobering to be reminded that sin has consequences even when there is forgiveness.

[22 : 36] And I think sometimes, as a church, we're not particularly honest about that. We like to think, and I think sometimes the gospel is preached, there are certain books that give this impression, that God's forgiveness wipes out all the consequences of sin.

And of course, wonderfully, it does wipe out some, doesn't it? And one day, wonderfully, it will. But we live in a sinful world.

And that means that you and I have to live with some of the consequences of our sin, even though we've been forgiven. And this chapter reminds us of that, and it's good to be reminded of that, because I think sometimes, when we're living with the aftermath of sin, it can feel like maybe God hasn't forgiven me.

Or maybe God is still angry with me. But this chapter reminds me, no, that's not the case. We can be forgiven, and God not be angry with us.

And yet, there are still consequences of our sin this side of heaven. And I think it's good to be reminded of that, because it helps shape our expectation of this life.

[23 : 45] And it holds out to us hope, doesn't it? This is what life is like in a very messy world.

But to be honest, most of us don't need the reminder, do we? Many of us know all too well the havoc wreaked by sin, by our own sin, or the sin of others.

Most of us know what it is to live with grief over our sins, even though they've been forgiven. Many of you will know what it's like to live with grief because of the sins that others have committed, which have affected you.

And these things are real to me, and I expect they are real to you. That I live with the grief of past sins committed. Of ways that I've hurt people, of words that I can't take back.

At times, I've despised God's word, or despised God. And I also live with the sadness of sins caused by others. And I know many of you live with similar griefs.

[24 : 59] And this is what life is like in this fallen and broken world. And we rightly, we rightly long for the day when God will end the brokenness and end the grief, and he will.

When the scar tissue of sin will be removed wonderfully. And he will. But for now, we live patiently with these things.

And it's not easy. And I don't expect it was easy for David. And I don't expect it will be easy for you. Secondly, the consequences of repentance.

And what I want to point out here is that repentance from sin is not just momentary. David's repentance moment comes from the first time in verse 13, where he acknowledges his sin and he confesses it to the Lord.

And that's no doubt a significant moment. It's a critical moment for him. But repentance is much longer than that. And this chapter emphasizes precisely that point. There is an humility in David's interactions with God and with others from this moment onwards.

[26 : 10] There's a submissiveness. To God's purpose, a desire to do his will. It's not like David confesses his sin and then carries on just living his life the way he wants to live it.

Because being exposed changes David and it should. And I think that's really clear when you read Psalm 51. Good for you to do that, to read that before you go, when you go to bed tonight.

Because it's David's particular prayer of confession after these particular sins. And it's a prayer that makes it very clear that repentance is long, not short.

It's ongoing, not momentary. It is weighty and not light. Let me read to you from Psalm 51 to show you from the second half. David says, A broken and a contrite heart, oh God you will not despise. It's much more, isn't it? Much, much more than a prayer of confession. It's a prayer for a changed life. A life of purity and of steadfastness. Of joy and of faithfulness. Of willing obedience.

[27 : 45] Of teaching others and praise. Of genuine contriteness of heart. And humble brokenness before God. And that's the picture that Psalm 51 paints.

Those are some of the consequences of repentance. And we do well to learn from David here.

Because for David, in the end, the pain of being exposed was worth it for David.

It broke him. And brokenness before God is the beginning of a different but a far better way of life.

And when we repent of our sin, that is the life we should seek for ourselves.

And it is the life that God offers us as repentance and rewards. Thirdly and finally, the consequence of grace. And simply here, I just want to point out that God's grace is everywhere in this chapter.

Just as repentance is not confined to verse 13 and David's confession. So grace is not confined to verse 13 and David's forgiveness. There's the grace that sends Nathan to David.

[29 : 01] In the first place. As one writer has put it, you may succeed in unfaithfulness. But God will come after you. And so what immense and genuine comfort.

Every servant. Of Christ should find in the first six words of this chapter. Seven.

And the Lord. Sent Nathan to David. That is the grace that pursues. And then there's the grace that exposes, isn't it?

Because exposing David's sin is in itself an act of God's kindness. It's very painful, yes. But it's the gateway to David being liberated from his failures.

It's an open door to a better life for David. And then there's the grace that precedes David's sin. It's the grace spoken of in verse 7 and 8. That talks about God's grace of his past kindness to David.

[30 : 09] Which shows up the foolishness of despising the Lord. This chapter speaks of that grace as well. And then there's the grace that forgives.

It's like the jewel in the crown of grace. It's certainly not the only grace in the chapter. But it is the most staggering. It is not a vending machine for David where he pays with his confession and he receives what he deserves or has every right to expect.

No, this is a miracle for David. It's a moment of unexpected mercy from the God he's despised. It's a moment of unmerited favor. Of life-saving kindness and of surprising love.

And so it is any time the Lord forgives us. And then I want to argue that there's the grace that does not remove sin's consequences.

And that might sound like a really strange thing to say, but I do want to point that out. That though the consequences of our sin are very much part of the mess of this world, which one day Christ will come to an end.

[31 : 13] Nevertheless, in a sinful world, it is by experiencing the consequences of sin that we sometimes learn our most valuable lessons, isn't it? Sometimes the Lord's discipline is just what we need to avoid making the same mistake or further mistakes in the world.

And to keep walking the path of obedience. There is grace for God's people even in sin's consequences. And finally in this chapter, there is the grace that continues to bless.

Because even after this terrible chapter in David's life, he continues to taste God's blessing. As we saw in the midst of what would be for David a terribly painful memory.

There were also many reasons to thank God. And this is a chapter from beginning to end about the consequences of God's grace. And as such, it's not only a very sobering chapter, but it's also a very reassuring one.

It's a chapter about David being exposed, yes, but it's also a chapter about the grace of God. Which is more than enough for all our sin. And it's a chapter that reminds you and I of the gospel that we have come to believe.

[32 : 33] The gospel which declares to us that there is nothing tonight that could ever be uncovered about us. That hasn't already been covered by the grace of Jesus.

There is nothing that could be uncovered about us that hasn't already been covered by Jesus.

David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.

And Nathan replied, The Lord has taken away your sin. Let's pray.