

18. Where sin abounded, grace abounded even more

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[0 : 00] Now, if you would turn, please, to the book of 2 Samuel on page 262. We're returning to our studies in the life of David in 1 and 2 Samuel.

The last time we looked at this, we had two very encouraging chapters. Chapter 7, the covenant with David, and then chapters 8 to 10, which talked about the victories that secured the kingdom and the covenant love that was shown in the kingdom.

We're coming this evening to a very, very different kind of story. Now, it's a long passage, chapters 11 and 12, so I'm going to read part of it, first of all, and then we'll sing a hymn and read the rest of it.

I'm going to read the whole of chapter 11 and a little bit into chapter 12, first of all. In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and 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 on the roof of the king's house that he saw from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful, and David sent and inquired about the woman.

[1 : 25] And one said, Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.

Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house, And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, I am pregnant.

So David sent word to Job, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Job sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Job was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war was going.

Then David said to Uriah, Go down to your house and wash your feet. And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king.

But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. And they told David, Uriah did not go down to his house.

[2 : 24] David said to Uriah, Have you not come from a journey? Why do you not go down to your own house? Uriah said to David, The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths.

And my lord Job and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink and to lie with my wife? As you live and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.

Then David said to Uriah, Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back. So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next.

And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie in his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Job and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him that he may be struck down and die.

[3 : 30] And as Job was besieging the city, he assigned to Uriah the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Job, and some of the servants of David among the people fell.

Uriah the Hittite also died. Then Job sent and told David all the news about the fighting. And he instructed the messenger, When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, then if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, Why did you go so near the city to fight?

Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? He mentioned in the book of Judges, Who killed Abimelech, the son of Jerubosheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall?

So he died at Thebes. Why did you go so near the wall? Then you shall say, Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. So the messenger went and came and told David all that Job had sent him to tell.

The messenger said to David, The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field. We drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archer shot at your servants from the wall.

[4 : 43] Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. David said to the messenger, Thus shall we say to Job, Let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another.

Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it, and encourage him. When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah, her husband, was dead, she lamented over her husband.

And when the morning 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.

Nathan came to him and said to him, There were two men in a certain city, 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 brought up, which he had bought, and he brought it up.

And it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms. And it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him.

[6 : 07] But he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him. Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, the 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.

Nathan said to David, You are the man. Amen. Now we're going to continue the reading, taking up after Nathan's devastating words to David.

Second part of verse 7 of chapter 12 on page 263. 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 this were too little, I would add to you 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.

[7 : 34] Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, 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 neighbor.

You shall lie with your wives in the sight of this son, for you did it secretly. But I will do this thing before all Israel and before the son.

And David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, The Lord has put away your sin.

You shall not die. Nevertheless, by this deed, you have utterly scorned the Lord. The child who is born to you shall die. Then Nathan went to his house.

And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted, and went into the sanctuary, and lay all night on the ground.

[8 : 44] And the elders of his house stood beside him to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day, the child died, and the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead.

For they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him, The child is dead? He may do himself harm.

When David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, Is the child dead? They said, He is dead.

Then David arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. He then went to his own house.

And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, What is this thing that you have done? You have fasted and wept for the child while he was alive. When the child died, you arose and ate food.

[9 : 47] David said, While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. For I said, Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me that the child may live? Now he is dead.

Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me. Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went into her and lay with her, and she bore a son.

And he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him. And he sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.

Amen. May God bless to us that striking, unpowerful, and disturbing passage from his word. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please. At page 262, we'll have a moment of prayer.

So we ask the Lord's help. God our Father, your word is quick and powerful, like a sharp two-edged sword.

[10 : 52] And we pray that your gracious Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, will now bring them to life in our hearts and in our lives.

And we pray that you will take my human words in all their imperfection, that you will use them faithfully to proclaim the written word. And so lead us to the living word, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. It was late afternoon, a sultry, warm, and sunny day, rather like the kind of weather we've had in recent times.

And the king had been resting on a couch on the flat roof of his palace. And now as the afternoon wears on, he gets up. As he paces round and round the wall and looks over the parapet, he sees a most beautiful woman.

The look becomes a gaze. The gaze becomes a series of actions. And before long, an illicit liaison leads to the death of a husband and of a child.

[12 : 17] David, the king, conqueror of Goliath, generous friend, chivalrous enemy, the Lord's anointed, becomes a wire, an adulterer, and a murderer by proxy.

How could it have happened? Kind of story on first reading we prefer not to be in the Bible. It's a brilliant story, isn't it?

David's spin doctors clearly have not been at work on it. You could imagine this story told a different way. You could imagine a seductive Bathsheba throwing herself at the exhausted king when his defences were down.

It's the kind of thing that filmmakers have made of the story. There isn't a hint of it in the text. There are no excuses made, no extenuating circumstances are presented and it's a leisurely story unlike the earlier stories of battle.

We are forced to linger on the story as it unfolds. Why? Now some commentators have pointed out in chapter 11 verse 1 in the spring of the year the time when kings go out to battle saying David had become rather lazy.

[13 : 35] That's maybe a bit unfair. a middle-aged man who had already proved his military prowess beyond any doubt. There's nothing particularly wrong in sending his commander-in-chief out to fight the battles.

After all, that's what commanders-in-chief are appointed for. I think there's probably a better hint in verse 2. A phrase that's repeated twice in that short verse.

Verse 2, So it happened late one afternoon when David rose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house that he saw from the roof a woman bathing.

On the roof he is monarch of all he surveys on the very top of his palace. Irresistibly reminded of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 4 walking on the roof of his palace and saying, Is not this great Babylon I have built for the honour of my majesty?

He is walking on the roof. He is looking down at everybody else. But behind it there is something yet more sinister. Behind it all there is the dark plot of Satan to destroy the Lord's anointed.

[14 : 48] When I talked about this story at Cornhill some months ago somebody said to me, Where is Satan in this story? And my reply was, Where isn't he? His footsteps are everywhere here.

He is determined to destroy the Lord's anointed. Unless we read the Old Testament story in the light of Genesis 3.15 about the battle between the woman and the descendant of the woman and the serpent we are not going to understand it.

It is a dark, dark story. Now this morning I was listening to Willie Preach I was really enjoying the sermon but as he went on and where he began to dawn in my mind he is saying everything I want to say this evening.

What am I going to have left to say? Now that is not surprising is it? This Bible of ours is the story of the covenant. The story of the covenant is the story of God's grace and the story of human sin.

So we would expect to find this covenant story cropping up over and over and over again because this is God's story. Look at verse 27 at the end of chapter 11.

[16 : 02] The thing David had done displeased the Lord. We will come back to that. Since this is God's story that is why I have given this sermon the title where sin abounded grace abounded even more.

That is how we are going to look at this story. It's a tremendously brilliant story. It's beautifully told and the very reading of it is chilling and the power of the narrative comes out.

I want to look at three particular streams that flow through this story. First of all David's sin completely violated the covenant. I said this is a story of the covenant.

A few weeks ago we look at 2 Samuel 7 and in verse 7 of that chapter David is appointed to be shepherd of his people. David is behaving more like wolf than shepherd violating the covenant he has pledged to uphold and not just the seventh commandment about adultery but breaking the whole spirit of the covenant.

Let's look at this a bit more closely. First of all he treats Bathsheba as an object rather than a woman. You'll notice apart from verse 3 in chapter 11 and this is in the third person she's not given a name throughout the whole of that chapter.

[17 : 29] She is simply the wife of Uriah and David sent messengers and took her and her words are limited to the words which must have struck a chill in David's heart I am pregnant.

So she's simply an object here. Now David's earlier dealings read the passage we looked at a few weeks ago with Mephibosheth David's dealings are marked by covenant love.

Is there any left of the house of Saul that I can show him the love of the covenant for Jonathan's sake? Here he isn't driven by covenant love he's driven by lust.

David was a passionate man and his passionate nature is so often used for good for evil as well as for good. Now in earlier parts of this series I've continually said we are not David but we have David's God.

I suspect no one in this room wants to say about this chapter we are David. But they would have missed the point wouldn't it?

[18 : 40] in every one of our hearts there lurks every sin in the book. In all of our hearts there lurks the temptation to sin.

That's what he said this morning temptation is not something you grow out of temptation is something that remains with you throughout your life. So he treats Bathsheba as an object.

He also behaves as if he's in charge instead of a servant. Now the essence of the covenant is the covenant is about the Lord who came in self-sacrificing love and gave him to us gave himself to us in his grace.

The word sent used so often about David in verse 4 David sent and inquired about the woman. and then in verse 6 send me Uriah the Hittite he sent word to Job send me Uriah the Hittite over and over again and then most chilling in verse 14 he in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah he gives Uriah his own death warrant to carry to Joab.

But there's a very different sending in 12 verse 1 we'll come back to this the Lord sent Nathan to David and then again in verse 25 of chapter 12 the Lord loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet.

[20:17] David behaves as if Bathsheba were simply an object he behaved he's driven by lust not by covenant love he behaves as if he were in charge instead of a servant and above everything else he is abusing his kingly power Uriah's loyalty to David was total we learn about this in chapter 23 which we'll look at at the end of the series David is behaving like an oriental despot this is as much about power as it is about sex and perhaps even more all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely said Lord Axton in the 19th century David's power has gone to his head and this is where look at Nathan's story in chapter 12 and this of course is part of the unfolding narrative because it's a story within a story notice there's no mention of adultery there's no mention of murder in a few clever word pictures we have the warm homely picture of this poor man whose lamb was not more than a pet indeed part of the family than in a few chilling strokes the rich man with his big bonuses and his wealthy arrogance you see how clever this is instantly all David's chivalrous instincts are aroused verse 5 of chapter 12 as the Lord lives the man who has done this deserves to die he judges the man and he judges himself you are the man surely among the most dramatic words ever spoken and just as

Moses coming down from the mountain and finding the people had been unfaithful to the covenant smashes the stone tablets so David's life is smashed the covenant relationship seems as if it's gone can the covenant survive sin is abounding now the second point I want to make and Willie made this point as well this morning about the family of Jacob not only was David's sin a complete violation of the covenant but David's sin had completely disastrous consequences first of all he tries to cover up the story of this sickening story here first of all he tries to get Uriah to go and stay with Bathsheba so when the child is born then people will think it's Uriah's child but Uriah refuses gets Uriah drunk and then he puts him in the front of the battle line

Uriah gate as they would call it nowadays signally fails the cover up does not work and what makes it worse is it puts him in the power of that dark and cynical man Joab you can see this in the next chapters actually how David's behaviour had robbed him of the moral right and the moral authority he had over Joab and it's shown in if you look at verse 20 25 of chapter 11 David said to the messenger thus shall we say to Joab do not let this matter trouble you now literally it says do not let this matter be evil in your eyes and look at the end of the chapter verse 27 the thing that David did was evil in the eyes of the Lord you see David tries to shrug it off oh don't worry too much about this don't let it be evil in your eyes the thing that David had done displeased the Lord you might well imagine this hardly needs to be said but surely the point is that

David thought he had got away with it David imagined we always imagine this when we indulge in sinfulness that we are different we can get away with it it was disaster the consequences were disastrous in the short term chapter 12 this very moving story verses 15 to 23 the child is born and we have the death of the child and the David fasting and praying earnestly and yet the child dies an interesting little detail in verse 23 can I bring him back again I shall go to him but he will not return to me now some people say that simply means David's going to die the way the child had died I think it's far deeper than that David doesn't say he's going to she's gone to Sheol so I'll go to Sheol this is David at that darkest moment glimpsing the light of life beyond the grave next Sunday evening in fact we're going to look at one of David's

Psalms where he does make that leap of faith beyond the darkness of death to the miracle of resurrection but this is the first disastrous consequence the child dies Uriah had died and now the child dies it's also disastrous in the longer term look at chapter 12 again verse 11 thus says the Lord behold I will raise up evil against you out of your own house and as we look at chapters 13 and following we'll see the continual the absolute breakdown of godliness in David's family culminating in the rebellion of his much loved but over indulged son Absalom as we saw this morning sin has consequences not lose our salvation but sin has consequences and often god allows these to work out in our lives to teach us lessons this is what's happening here it's a dark story isn't it how easy it would be to moralize and to apply it to others let each of us listen to these words you are the man you are the woman this forces us to face up to the reality of our own sin which is inexcusable no point in saying we haven't sinned this way remember where David's sin began began with a lustful look that's where it began but before we know where we are we're plunged into this maelstrom of death deception and total lack of covenant loyalty truly sin and death abound the picture is black isn't it and we have to face that judgment is real because sin cannot be excused that's the point

[27 : 29] David's sin completely violated the covenant David's sin completely disastrous in its consequences where's the gospel where is the light that brings me to my third point David's sin was completely forgiven praise God grace abounded even more the turning point you see of the story is chapter 12 verse 1 the Lord sent Nathan to David doesn't say the Lord struck down David for his sin doesn't say the Lord the Lord said to David I'm rejecting you the way I rejected Saul the Lord sent Nathan to David to open a way back and Nathan gets behind his defense as I said look again at the story Nathan doesn't come to David and say David you're a filthy womanizer and an unscrupulous murderer doesn't do that he gets

David to judge himself doesn't he that man will die he deserves to die yes says Nathan he does deserve to die but do you know you know what that man's called that man is called David you are the man David judges himself so that's the first sign of grace isn't it the Lord sent Nathan to David when the Lord sends a prophet or a preacher it's to bring people back to himself to open the way of grace and David repents now it's only one phrase here in verse 13 of chapter 12 I have sinned against the Lord he pours out his heart in Psalm 51 we sang that version earlier on he realises the heart of what he has done because in that in that Psalm he says against you you only have I sinned I thought he had sinned against everybody sinned against

Uriah sinned against Bathsheba sinned against his people sinned against everybody but at the very heart is he has sinned against the Lord and he is gripped by the fear of God and by the hymn grace taught my heart to fear grace doesn't just teach our hearts to rejoice grace teaches our hearts to fear grace is not niceness grace is judgment followed by mercy and the wonderful thing is that while sin is not excusable sin is forgivable that is the gospel blessed is the one says David in Psalm 32 whose transgression is forgiven whose sin is covered back to the story of Saul what did Saul do when he was confronted with his guilt he made excuses he tried to he tried to argue his way out of it he pretended it was nothing very serious at all you see as long as we moralize and make excuses grace cannot enter only by grace can we enter that's how we enter the kingdom let's not forget the second phrase only it's grace which brings us into the kingdom but it's grace which sustains us in the kingdom the

Lord sends Nathan David repents and the third thing and this is very much in the line of what Willie was saying this morning as well the covenant line continues you see if the kingdom was going to come in through David's goodness then this was going to destroy it wasn't it there be this is God's story look at verses 24 and 25 of chapter 12 and notice the difference in tone here it's impossible to avoid the whole difference in tone this is not Uriah's wife some object to be sent for and used for his pleasure then David comforted his wife Bathsheba and went into her and she bore a son and she called his name Solomon there is the covenant hope and another message comes from Nathan the Lord loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet he called his name Jedidiah the one whom the

Lord loves because of the Lord David David's sin did not destroy the kingdom any more than David's goodness brought it in as we look further into the Bible we can see this we can see this working out in the covenant story centuries later the king who is most like David Hezekiah was faced by terrible enemies and the Assyrians the Lord says through the prophet Isaiah I'm going to defend this city for my sake fair enough he also says and for the sake of my servant David David in God's purposes is still the anointed government king sin is appalling consequences dire and repentance bitter and almost at the very end of our

[33 : 13] Bibles the risen Lord says I am the root and offspring of David the bright and morning star this dark dark story the light of the gospel shines more brightly the blood shed at Calvary the fountain open for sin and uncleanness has washed away his sin whenever our hearts condemn us says John God is greater than our hearts this is a story of covenant violation it's a story of disastrous consequences but it's a story of amazing grace of David wonderfully forgiven it's a story which tells us that where sin abounded grace abounded even more amen let's pray father as we read a story like this we cannot afford to be pharisaical and pretend we are better we come to you once again on the grounds of the merits of the lamb of god and of his abounding grace which is greater than our sin and uncleanness and we pray and we pray indeed that in the days to come we will recognize ever more acutely our own sinfulness and weakness and our tendency to stray from you will depend more and more upon your wonderful grace we ask this in Jesus name amen and I will depend