

“Sola Gratia / Authenticity”

Series: Always Reforming: The Reformation and the Life of David

2 Samuel 11:25-12:25

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Before the text: This story covers two chapters. Summary... David’s armies are at war. He is not. David – one night – sees a woman bathing – sends for her and sleeps with her. When he finds out she is pregnant, he sends for her husband, Uriah the Hittite, and brings him home from battle to try to get him to sleep with his wife so that the child will look to be his. He won’t. Because he is faithfully fighting this war. And so David sends him back into the fight with a letter to his commander, Joab, to make sure Uriah gets killed. The deed is done. Joab sends word back to David, and we pick it up at verse 25.

Read text: 2 Samuel 11:25-12:25

David and his lambs... when we first meet David. He is a shepherd boy, taking care of his sheep. And he cared well for his sheep... He made sure they lacked nothing. He made them lie down in green pastures. He led them beside still waters. He took them along good paths. When they would walk through dark valleys, his sheep would have no need to fear, for he was with them, guiding them with his staff. If a lion came upon his flock to carry one off, he would chase after that lion, strike it, rescue the sheep from the lions mouth and then seize it by its hair and strike it and kill it. Sometimes he would lead his sheep from ahead, and sometimes he would lead them from behind – following them. And when he spoke and called to them, his sheep

would know the sound of his voice. And they would know that where their shepherd was, there was goodness and love. David knew his sheep and he cared for them well.

Fast forward to now. David is king and shepherd of Israel. And one day, Pastor Nathan comes to tell David a story about a little lamb. David settles in for the story. This lamb was no ordinary lamb – not one among many. One and only. This was a ewe lamb who lived in the house of a poor man. This lamb was the centre of this man’s family. The man raised the lamb like one of his children. It grew up in the home, ate at the table with the family. Drank from her master’s cup and shared the family bed. She was loved and known and cared for. Perhaps as David listened, his mind traveled back to his days with his sheep – remembering that one lamb that he had rescued and how special that lamb had become to him.

The story takes a dark turn. A wealthy neighbour who had more sheep and cattle than he knew what to do with had a surprise guest arrive one day. He happened to see the happy little lamb romping about in his neighbour’s lawn – and whether it was for the sake of convenience, or because he resented his neighbour’s joy, he took the lamb and cooked it up and served it to his guest for lunch.

And David was horrified.

The neighbour took the lamb. Taking is what the rich and powerful can do, if they want to. They take things. They take life by the horns. They take what they want. And people that get in their way – well, they have enough money and power and influence to take care of those little problems, too. This is what the rich and powerful can do, if they want to.

This is what *kings* can do, if they want to. In fact, *taking* is what good old Samuel said would happen if God agreed to the Israelite’s request for a king. “This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will *take* your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses... He will *take* your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will *take* the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves... He will *take* a tenth of your grain and of your vintage... He will *take* for his own use [your male and female servants]...¹⁷ He will *take* a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day” (1 Samuel 8:11-19).

Taking. It's what kings can do, if they want to. And though David didn't see it immediately as he heard the story of the little lamb, this is exactly what he did. He did it because he wanted to.

Using the very same action words attributed to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, we read in 2 Samuel 11 that David *saw* (v. 2 – *ra'ah*, רָאָה) a beautiful woman (as Eve *saw* the ripe fruit). [Actually, I want to amend this a bit. David did not see *Bathsheba*. He saw on objectification of her. To paraphrase Pope John Paul: the problem wasn't that he saw too much of her, but that he saw too little. But...] he saw what he saw like Eve *saw* the fruit.

Then David sent messengers to *take* (v. 4 – verb for 'got' is also 'take' – *la'qach* - לָקַח) her (as Eve *took* the fruit from the tree). You would think, with a relationship to God as strong as David's was, and with a heart as full and open as David's heart was, that his eyes would have been open to his sin immediately (just like Adam and Eve's had been!), but when he learned that the woman was pregnant, he rushed to hide his sin with Bathsheba in the garden of Bathsheba's relationship with her husband, Uriah the Hittite. And when David could not (for the life of him!) get Uriah the Hittite to sleep with his wife, even though he tried six ways from Sunday, he had Uriah the Hittite *killed* (2 Samuel 12:9- *cha'rag* - חָרַג) in battle – again the very same verb used to describe the first murder – Cain, against his brother, Abel. Cain killed Abel. David, with the sword of the Ammonites, killed Uriah.

When David learns that his plan has worked – that Uriah is dead – he said to his army commander, 'Don't let this be evil in your eyes' (v. 25). In other words, I don't see this as evil. You shouldn't either. I took what I wanted. I took Bathsheba – and then I took the life of her husband. I am a king. I can do this, if I want to. Don't let this be evil in your eyes.

And the last verse of 1 Samuel 11 says, "The thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (v. 27).

It wasn't until the Lord, through the words of Nathan, the prophet, tapped back into the earlier days of David's love for him – tapped back into the days when he was a shepherd boy, loving his Lord and loving his sheep – it wasn't until the little story about the little lamb - it wasn't until the prophet Nathan uttered the courageous words, "You are the man!" – that David's eyes were opened and he realized what he had done.

The pillar of the Reformation that we are considering today is *Sola Gratia*, we are saved by grace alone... and these courageous and authentic words of truth are the beginning of the grace. As the realization washes over David, we hear a litany of God's provision in David's life. We remember, as we listen, that God is a giver – and it is by no accident that the name of the prophet who spoke these words is *Na'tan* – Giver. "I *anointed* you king," God says (v. 7). "I *delivered* you from the hand of Saul. I *gave* you your master's house... I *gave* you Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have *given* you even more." And you took. You took Bathsheba and you took the life of Uriah.

The consequences of David's actions are severe. Calamity. The sword. Humiliation. And even after David repented, a heart-breaking consequence: God took the life of the child born from all of David's taking.

But now I want to focus in on the little sentence in 2 Samuel 12:13. It is a courageous little sentence... The third of three courageous little sentences in this narrative. The first courageous sentence comes when Bathsheba tells David, "I am pregnant." This turns the whole story inside out. Then David turns the story upside-down with the murder of Uriah, and with Nathan, we have the second courageous sentence: "You are the man!" This sentence turns the story right-side up – it's the beginning of grace. And David's courageous sentence is found in verse 13: "I have sinned against the Lord." This is not only courageous; this is authentic. This is the moment when David is done hiding and he brings his sin-stained hands into the presence of the Lord. And though there are consequences to his sin – with ripple effects that probably still extend to this day – the mercy and grace of God speak through Nathan's words, "The Lord has taken away your sin." And the mercy and grace of God speak through the giving of another child – little Solomon. A child who was loved by the Lord. And loved by David. And loved by his mother, Bathsheba. And given also the name, *Jedidiah*, which means, 'loved by the Lord.'

Martin Luther was consumed by his sin, and by his guilt. In a little article he wrote on *Sola Gratia*, seminary professor Lyle Bierma said, Luther "became a monk, taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He prayed to God almost nonstop, confessing the tiniest sins he could remember. He flogged himself, deprived himself of sleep, and starved himself so severely that, according to one report, 'his belly button touched his backbone.' But rather than

drawing near to God, he felt himself slipping further away” (*Calvin Theological Forum*: Spring 2017, p. 10). I was looking back at my notes on the Reformation, and my church history professor (Richard Muller) said that Luther’s sense of God’s righteousness was like a weight that crushed him.

Until! Until... one day as he was reading through the Psalms and Romans and the weight lifted. The righteousness of God was not a weight that crushed him, the righteousness of God was a righteousness that made him righteous. It was not a righteousness that condemned, but a righteousness that freed! And this righteousness of Christ – this grace – became the song that Martin Luther sang. It was as if *he washed, put on lotions, changed his clothes, and went into the house of the Lord and worshiped, and ate a meal* (cf. 2 Samuel 12:20).

And this is God’s grace for you, too! Whatever you have done, no matter how evil it is in the eyes of the Lord, you are saved by grace alone. You, too, are washed, in the waters of baptism, clothed with the righteousness of Christ, invited to worship God before the throne, authentically bringing all of you who are because you are forgiven... and there is a place at this table for you.

Remember last week? At the end of the message, I invited you to imagine, instead of David the shepherd boy coming down to the battle lines with food to feed the faith of his brothers... I invited you to imagine Jesus, your shepherd, coming down to your battle lines with food to feed your faith.

And now, I want to make another shift with you... because there are those of you here who, perhaps, identify less with David in this text, and more with Bathsheba. There is a whole other message in this text. The “B side.” The Bathsheba side. For we need to know – what is grace? - not only for the one who has sinned, but what is grace for the one who has been sinned against.

Perhaps you, too, have been taken. Perhaps you have been abused, made a victim through the power of another. Jesus walks with you. For he was also taken. And he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:7). He was assigned a grave with the wicked, though he had done no violence,

nor was any deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9). Surely, he took up your pain and bore your suffering (Isaiah 53:4). By his wounds, you are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

[Words of institution... “The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread...”]

John Calvin wrote many things about communion. He wrote about how should be celebrated every time the word is preached – at least once a week. But he also said that when we eat and drink, the Holy Spirit raises us to heaven, and we are united with Christ.¹ It is appropriate, then, that we peek with apostle John behind the veil in Revelation 5:12-13:

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

¹ John Calvin ‘Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments; between the Ministers of the Church of Zurich and John Calvin, Minister of the Church of Geneva’ John Calvin *Tracts: Containing Treatises on the Sacraments, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, an Confessions of Faith, Volume Second* Henry Beveridge trans (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849 [1554] p 240