

David and Bathsheba

Sermon for the Parish of South Darebin 28 July 2024

2 Samuel 11: 1–15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3: 14–21; John 6: 1–21

It might surprise you that this morning I have decided to say a few words about our Old Testament reading and the disgraceful story of David's sin with Bathsheba. I chose this passage because it is so human, so true to what sadly often happens in society – perhaps not to the point of murder, although even that occurs from time to time. Overlaid on this story of sexual temptation and sin, shame and the action to try to hide that shame, is the knowledge that the perpetrator of this crime is the second King of Israel, David, the giant killer, David the one who, despite having the opportunity to do so, refused to kill King Saul when Saul was trying to kill him. This is David, the one who is described as 'a man after God's own heart'. This man, who established Jerusalem as the City of God and who was the ancestor of the Lord Jesus, gave in to temptation, committing adultery and murder, and then tried to cover it all up because of his position of power and authority in his society. You can just imagine him thinking, 'I can get away with this. I am the king. No one can touch me.' Hmm. Remind you of anyone?

What can you and I learn from this story?

I wonder what led David to fall into sin. One possibility is that David was idle, not focusing on his life's work:

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army... But David remained in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11 :1).

David, a warrior king, chose to stay behind during a time of battle. His decision to remain idle set the stage for his downfall. It was during this time of inactivity that David's eyes and heart wandered, leading him to commit adultery with Bathsheba. Idleness can often lead us into temptation and sin. When we are not actively engaged in fulfilling God's purpose for our lives, we become vulnerable to temptation and the weaknesses we have.

David's sin did not end with his act of adultery. Sin has a way of compounding itself. What begins as a seemingly small lapse in judgment can spiral into a series of grievous actions. David's attempt to cover his sin only led to more sin, culminating in murder. This passage serves as a stark reminder of the destructive nature of sin and the lengths to which we might go to hide our transgressions – to hide our shame. As humans we don't cope well with shame. We see this in the very first story in the book of Genesis. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they tried to hide themselves from God, just as people today try to hide their sin from others.

Contrast David's actions with those of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. Despite being given the opportunity to enjoy the comforts of home, Uriah chooses to stand in solidarity with his fellow soldiers. His integrity shines brightly against the backdrop of David's deceit. Uriah's commitment to doing what is right, even when it was difficult, stands as an example for us all.

As Christians, we are called to live lives of integrity, even when no one is watching. Our actions should be consistent with our beliefs, and our commitment to God should guide our decisions.

As I am sure you are aware, although David's actions were grievous, his story does not end with the death of Uriah. David brought the pregnant Bathsheba into his house and tried to go on as if nothing had happened, but God sent the prophet Nathan to David who revealed to David that God was aware of his sin and as a result, David would face conflict all his days. David was overcome with remorse. The child that was born to Bathsheba became ill as soon as it was born and David stopped eating and sat in sackcloth and ashes in repentance for his dastardly deeds.

David's song in Psalm 51 is a heartfelt plea for forgiveness:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. (Psalm 51: 1–4)

And a little later:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.
(Psalm 51: 10–12)

No matter how far we have fallen, God's grace is sufficient to redeem us. In his first letter, St John reassures us: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness'. (1 John 1: 9).

David's repentance and God's forgiveness remind us of the power of God's grace and His willingness to restore those who turn back to Him. We might ask ourselves, 'How can God forgive such a wicked man as David? How can such a wicked person be restored to righteousness before God?'

One of the most profound aspects of the Christian faith is the concept of God's boundless grace and forgiveness. How can God forgive someone like David? Well, let's explore this question through several key biblical principles.

Firstly, the Bible repeatedly emphasises that God's mercy and grace are not bound by human limitations. Psalm 103:8-12 beautifully captures this:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

God's forgiveness is rooted in His character—His steadfast love and mercy. It's not something we earn, but something He freely offers out of His abundant grace.

Secondly, David's story is a powerful example of true repentance. When confronted by the prophet Nathan, David didn't make excuses or try to justify his actions. Instead, he acknowledged his sin and genuinely repented. David's heartfelt repentance and recognition of his need for God's mercy were crucial in his forgiveness.

Thirdly, God's forgiveness does not negate His justice. The punishment for sin is severe, and in the Old Testament, this was demonstrated through various laws and sacrificial systems. However, the ultimate expression of God's justice and mercy is found in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Romans 3: 23–26 explains this: 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.'

Through Jesus' sacrificial death, God's justice was satisfied, and His mercy was made available to all who believe, including David.

Finally, God's forgiveness is also about transforming the sinner's heart. When God forgives, He not only wipes away the sin but also works to transform the individual. David's life after his repentance showed a man striving to follow God's ways, even though he still faced consequences for his actions. God's forgiveness leads to a new path, one that seeks to align with His will and purposes.

The story of David and Bathsheba encourages us to acknowledge our sins, seek God's forgiveness with a contrite heart, and trust in the transformative power of His grace. It reminds us that God is not only just but also the ultimate source of compassion and redemption, capable of forgiving and renewing even the gravest of sinners.