

David and Bathsheba
Chris Deeds

A note to readers: This is a manuscript of my sermon that I use when I preach. It is written so when I preach, I have the prompts and style I can remember when I behind the pulpit. Therefore, if it 'reads' with an unusual tone, it is because this is my personal teleprompter.

2 Samuel 11:1–15 (New Revised Standard Version)

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; 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 about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on 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 Joab, 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, so that he may be struck down and die."

I like reading some of the British newspapers online. The papers give a different vantage point of the news that we might not read in America. Like our news, they can be rather sensationalist. When Prince Harry and his wife Meghan left the U.K., most stories were not flattering. Meghan is a bully! Harry was duped! How could they leave their royal duties? Then the papers gave this story a name-Megxit. Megxit is a slur on Brexit, or when England left the European union to stand on their own. Then there was the Oprah interview. That was like poking a bee's nest. How dare they! Scandal! Outrage!

I imagine if David and Bathsheba were part of our modern-day world, the headlines might be similar. Scandal rocks the King's palace! King David was overheard asking for a woman he saw on a rooftop—who could it be?! Insiders say lady David slept with is pregnant...and the baby might be the King's! Did David have one of his own killed so he could take his wife? Who is this mystery woman?

As we read this story of David and Bathsheba from afar, we can see disaster written all over it. David decides he wants to go on spring break, David has a fling during spring break, after spring break the woman says, 'Remember me, I am pregnant.' Since David is a king, he tries to trick Bathsheba's husband to sleep with his wife so Uriah will think the child is his, but Uriah is too loyal to go home and does not, even when David gets him drunk. Then David has another brilliant idea and says, 'hey, I have an idea, let me send Uriah to the front lines and get him killed,' and sure enough Uriah is killed. David tells his army leader Joab, 'now don't let his death trouble you, it happens-people get killed in war all of the time. Forget about it!' After Bathsheba spends the necessary time of mourning her husband's death, she gets a note from the king saying, come live with me, so the very pregnant Bathsheba goes and lives with David and they lived happily ever after. The end. Not quite.

Do you recall how David became king? He was God's choice. I Samuel 16 says " ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward." God's choice.

The story of David and Bathsheba is a cautionary tale of the dangers of an unchecked ego, fallible leadership, pain and sorrow. However, as much as the story is about David, it is about those around him who suffered because of his poor choices. Choices.

First, let us look at Bathsheba. We know she was beautiful; we know she was bathing; we know she was married to Uriah. However, like it or not, she was forced to sleep with the king. A married woman. And when David was done with her, he sent her back home. What about Bathsheba? Who is caring for her?

Next, there is Uriah. So loyal to the king, the king that slept with his wife without his knowledge, that he refused all the luxuries David offered to appease his own guilty conscience. And rather than be a leader, David had him killed.

And what about Joab? The captain of the army is out fighting a battle when he receives a direct order from King David-sent Uriah to the front to be killed. Joab was forced to kill one of his own-a good, loyal, soldier. Later, when the deed is done, Joab sends a rather terse message back to the king. "Why did you go so near the wall?" then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too.' In other words, if the king questions my decisions in battle, tell him I did his dirty work. Time passes. Bathsheba mourns her husband, and afterward, she is summoned to David's house to live with him. Then the day of reckoning comes for David.

The prophet Nathan shows up to visit David and says, 'hey King, let me tell you a story. Two men lived in the same town, one rich, one poor. The rich guy has a lot of sheep and cattle, the other dude owns nothing except for one little ewe lamb. He loved it like it was his own child. When the rich man had a visitor come by one day, instead of killing one of his lambs for supper, he took the one ewe from the poor man. "David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must

pay for the lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity!" Vs. 7 says, Then Nathan said to David, you are the man!' (Or the more dramatic KJV- "Thou art the man!).

"This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues, Was once thought honest." Macbeth. William Shakespeare. David was the chosen king. Good looking. Talented. Fair. Honest. Part of the problem with David that instead of owning up to his mistakes, he continued to make more to cover up the first ones. He forced himself upon Bathsheba. (Side note-over the years, many have tried to make Bathsheba the scapegoat. She should not have been bathing, being good looking and all that...) She conceives. Stop right there. David could have owned up to his abuse. Confessed to his soldier. Instead, David moves to step two-try to cover up his mistake. Tells Uriah to go home, take a break from battle. That does not work. Step three. Kill and bury the mistake...which works until God unearths it and throws it down back at David's feet.

This is not a fun story to read. And maybe that is the point. A commentary I read said these scriptures have been romanticized to the point it was made into a film in the 1950's called David and Bathsheba. It says that "Indeed, David and Bathsheba often make the list of the world's great lovers alongside Romeo and Juliet, Anthony and Cleopatra. The film presents Uriah as a soldier with no interest in his wife, David as lonely in his royal office, and Bathsheba as a neglected wife who finds her true love in David. But the biblical text does not give us a romance. David has no interest in an ongoing relationship or marriage until Bathsheba becomes pregnant, and even then, he prefers the solution of making Uriah the father." Then the commentary gives a great suggestion. It says, "when we preach and teach this story, we must be clear: It is the story of a fallen hero."¹

Our streets are littered with fallen heroes. Actors are found to be predators. Presidents and Prime Ministers are wolves in sheep's clothing. Athlete's cheat. Spouses kill their partners and their children. The rich take from the poor to increase their wealth. That is the narrative we live in daily. But what we do with the narrative is equally as important. We learn from the mistakes. We vow to hold fast to what is good and flee what is evil. We take a page from Philippians 4:8- "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worth of praise, think about these things." We gather in community and support one another. We confess our sins to one another. We concentrate on what we can do this day and not worry about tomorrow. As Christians, we shine light in darkness...and there are a lot of people stumbling in the dark today. David is a cautionary tale of leadership gone astray. Fortunately, we know the end of the story. More importantly, we have a loving God who cares so much that God helps us learn from the scripture, avoid the temptations we face, and be more than conquerors in a world that needs more heroes. We have plenty of foes. Let us be friends to and for one another.

¹ NIB Commentary, p. 1288-1289