July 22, 2018

2 Samuel 11:27b-12:14

Bible Characters You Never Heard Of: Nathan

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2 Samuel 11:27b-12:14 Common English Bible

But what David had done was evil in the Lord’s eyes. So the Lord sent Nathan to David. When Nathan arrived he said, “There were two men in the same city, one rich, one poor.  The rich man had a lot of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing—just one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised that lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup—even sleep in his arms! It was like a daughter to him. “Now a traveler came to visit the rich man, but he wasn’t willing to take anything from his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had arrived. Instead, he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the visitor.” David got very angry at the man, and he said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the one who did this is demonic! He must restore the ewe lamb seven times over because he did this and because he had no compassion.” “You are that man!” Nathan told David. “This is what the Lord God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you from Saul’s power. I gave your master’s house to you, and gave his wives into your embrace. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. If that was too little, I would have given even more. Why have you despised the Lord’s word by doing what is evil in his eyes? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife as your own. You used the Ammonites to kill him. Because of that, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own, the sword will never leave your own house. “This is what the Lord says: I am making trouble come against you from inside your own family. Before your very eyes I will take your wives away and give them to your friend, and he will have sex with your wives in broad daylight. You did what you did secretly, but I will do what I am doing before all Israel in the light of day.” “I’ve sinned against the Lord!” David said to Nathan. “The Lord has removed your sin,” Nathan replied to David. “You won’t die. However, because you have utterly disrespected the Lord by doing this, the son born to you will definitely die.”

Have you ever thought about why you are a Christian? I am a Christian because I was born into a family that had Christian parents. We went to church, and we were involved. We sang in the choir and went to Sunday School and I was taken to youth group when I was old enough. I am a Christian because my mom made sure that I went to Confirmation classes all school year long. I am a Christian because people in my life, like my Sunday School teachers and my youth group counselors, loved me and prayed for me and I felt it. All four years of high school I was in a weekly small group. We prayed for one another and learned about Jesus who loved us and never let us go.

A few years ago I went to a conference in Chicago and I heard from Rev. Daniel Hill who wrote a book called White Awake. He is the pastor of River City which is a multiethnic church in Chicago. I now follow him on twitter and he said this last week, “One of the reasons I have come to such a clear belief in Christianity is due to the way it unflinchingly describes sin - history repeatedly shows the human tendency to dominate the other: men over women, rich over poor, white over people of color. What better describes that tendency than sin?”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Our story today is a story about Nathan who is able to help a man with great power see how he has used that power to dominate, kill, and hurt others. It is a story about someone who helps to point out sin. Did you know the Greek word for sin is an archery term? It means to miss the target. Sin is whatever causes us to miss the target God has given our lives; it is anything that separates us from the love of God and neighbor.

In our story for today, King David has fallen madly in lust with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his mercenary generals, Uriah. Bathsheba becomes pregnant, and David tries to cover it all up. He invites Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife Bathsheba, but Uriah is too devoted to his soldiers. David has Uriah carry a letter to the commander-in-chief of the Israelite army that says to put Uriah on the front line and Uriah is killed. The child is born and David and Bathsheba marry, and then Nathan comes into the throne room and we have this story. READ SCRIPTURE.

We don’t hear from Bathesheba in our story. She is silent. So many victims of sexual violence today are silent and silenced. Nathan uncovers the ugly reality of violence against women.[[2]](#footnote-2)

David thinks he has gotten off scot-free with a new queen and a boy to follow in his footsteps as king. When David hears Nathan’s story he is outraged. Of course the rich man must be killed. David is behaving as we expect. He is acting like a leader and fighting for justice. But David is the lamb thief, David has stolen Uriah’s wife and murdered Uriah. Nathan doesn’t hold anything back.

There is this charge of Nathan’s sin and David says to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” David has also sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah but David doesn’t recognize that. David has broken half of the 10 commandments. Nathan assures David that forgiveness is instantaneous. David’s evil deeds are forgiven but Nathan says they are not forgotten, and horribly the innocent baby will die. To me, this is the most disturbing part of this story. David won’t die, but his child will. How is it fair that the sins of the father will be visited upon the son?

How do we make sense of this connection between sin and suffering? If I think about my own actions, it makes sense. When I mess up, when I miss the mark in my life, I am going to suffer. When my words or my actions are not loving, I am going to endanger my relationships with others. When I sin and make assumptions about others and judge others, I am going to suffer because I am missing out on getting to know that person. When I sin, others also suffer. When I am impatient and yell at my children or my spouse, they suffer. But, how do I make sense of the innocent child who gets cancer and dies? Did the child sin? No. Did their parents sin? No. How do I make sense of the people or the families who are doing the best that they can, and they suffer? Did their sin cause their suffering? No.

How do we deal with this deeply problematic connection that is in the Bible about sin and suffering? Guess what David does about it? After David’s baby is born, the baby becomes sick. David prays desperately for the life of his child. David doesn’t eat, he doesn’t leave his house, he sleeps on the floor. People try to get David to get off the floor or to eat something, but he won’t budge. On the seventh day, the child dies. When David finds out, he gets up from the floor, he washes his face, he combs his hair, he puts on a fresh change of clothes, he goes into the sanctuary and he worships. He eats and he comforts his wife Bathsheba.

David’s actions show that he is not only resisting the forces of death but also resisting the theological framework. He is resisting this connection between sin and suffering. He is saying, Nathan, you may be telling me that my child will die because of what I have done, but I don’t believe it. I am going to do everything I can to feel close to God.

There is another thing that I appreciate about David in this story. He is in the most powerful position and he easily could have silenced the voices of dissent around him. In fact, he could have killed Nathan. It is so easy to insulate ourselves away from critical voices. David doesn’t do that and Nathan courageously speaks truth to power. Nathan does it in a way that is able to draw David in and allows David to see himself and his sins. Nathan teaches us to speak to injustice and the abuse of power but to think creatively about how to do it in a way that those in power will best be able to hear.

Is David a changed man? Does this recognition that he has sinned change his life forever? Is that how it works for us? That isn’t how it works for me. I mess up, I miss the mark, I sin every single day, many times each day. This interaction with Nathan is a place on the road for a man of deep flaws.[[3]](#footnote-3) Nathan points out for us that the bad things we do today affect all of our tomorrows in ways that we can never quite predict and certainly do not want.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Sin is when I let something other than God’s love control my life. God wants us to be controlled by the love of Christ. God is a God of grace and hope, who forgives our faults and redeems our mistakes, and offers a chance to start anew.

When I was in college at Trinity University in San Antonio I was a hall director. I was responsible for a floor of freshman women. One night someone knocked on my dorm room. She told me that her roommate was bleeding. It turned out that her roommate cut herself on purpose. She had scars all down her arms and legs. I found out that she did this because she didn’t think that anyone loved her. She said her parents didn’t love her and she even said that God didn’t love her. Sometimes we too feel worthless or unloved without a reason to live.

We don’t like who we are and we believe God accepts and values everyone except us. We believe that God doesn’t really forgive us of our past. We condemn ourselves and live in our own guilt. We let our faults, failures, and bad feelings tell us who we are. 1 John 3:20 says that “Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.” The grace in God is greater than the sin in us, where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Romans 5:20-21). God knows our sin and God is full of grace to accept, forgive, and heal. In Romans 8:38-39, Paul says, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Grace reunites us with God and one another. Thanks be to God. Amen.

1. https://twitter.com/danielhill1336/status/1017919224839274496 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\_id=2861 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/2015/07/what-goes-around-john-c-holbert-07-28-2015.aspx?p=2 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/2015/07/what-goes-around-john-c-holbert-07-28-2015.aspx?p=2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)