

THE GREATEST SINNER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Psalm 51:1-17

The Bible contains the biographies of many who lived paradoxical lives. They were one thing one day and something else on another day. One day they were the best of people, and the next day they were the worst. Samson was at his worst when he consorted with a harlot and failed God. He was at his best when he gave his life to wreak vengeance upon the enemies of God. Solomon was at his worst when he married many strange women and displeased God. He was at his best when he prayed like a little child and asked God for wisdom. Simon Peter was at his worst when he denied the Lord Jesus with an oath. He was at his best when he stood before thousands on the day of Pentecost and preached Christ.

After all, these men were human just as we are. We, too, live paradoxical lives. One day we are on the mountaintop and the next day we are in the valley. One day we are praying, and the next day we are sinning. One day we are serving God, and the next day we are serving the devil. One day we are living close to the heart of God, and the next day we are far from Him. But David's life was the most paradoxical of all. One day he was a man after God's own heart, and the next day he was committing one of the greatest sins recorded in the Bible. Let us study his life and see if we cannot learn some important lessons.

I. Who David Was.

1. David was a shepherd boy.

David was the youngest of the several sons of Jesse. He was assigned the task which was usually given to slaves, that of watching the sheep.

David saw something that we often miss. He saw God in nature. That is not the highest revelation of God, but it is one revelation. When we look at the heavenly bodies by day and night, when we look at the rushing rivers, the restless seas, the mighty forests, the towering mountains, the glorious sunset, the twinkling stars and the silvery moon, how can we help but say, "He is a great God of power and majesty Who loves beauty. He is behind all of nature."

It was while David was out in the fields with only the sheep for company that he formed a close companionship with God. While looking after the sheep, he thought of God as being a shepherd. Later, looking back over those days, he wrote the immortal words: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm 23).

2. David was the killer of a giant.

The time came when the Israelites were faced with the mighty army of the Philistines. Each day the Philistines sent their hero, Goliath, out to scare the Israelites. He was the tallest, the biggest and the strongest man in the army. Each day he strutted out before the Israelites and almost

scared them out of their wits. Then one day David came to bring food to his brothers who were in the army. He saw Goliath and inquired about him. He was told that any man who killed this giant would reap a rich reward and would win the hand of the king's daughter in marriage. David selected five smooth stones and put one of them in a sling. As he went out to meet Goliath the big man came toward him, mocking him. David said, "I am coming to you in the name of the Lord God." David cast his first stone and it sank into the giant's head. Goliath fell to the ground. Then David rushed up and cut off his head. The Philistines started running and the Israelites were the victors.

3. David was a popular hero.

David married Michal, the daughter of King Saul and became a close friend of Jonathan, the king's son. David was victorious in many battles and soon became so popular that a song was written about him. The song said, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his tenthousands." This made Saul very angry. On several occasions he tried to kill David, but God intervened each time and prevented him doing so.

When Saul committed suicide David became the king. But even when David was a boy God had chosen him to be king. Samuel had gone to the house of Jesse and anointed David. Now he enters into his kingly office. He became Israel's greatest king. He brought the nation to its finest days. Years later, when trouble came to the country, the people looked back and longed for the days that David had given them.

One sentence in the Bible describes David better than any other -- "David was a man after God's own heart." That does not mean that he was perfect. But, in spite of his sin and shortcomings David loved God and God loved him. There is comfort here for all of us. In spite of all our sins and shortcomings, God still loves us.

II. What David Did.

David extended his kingdom by conquering his enemies round about. He reigned over Israel in justice and righteousness. God gave him signal victories and great prosperity. He was a man of sterling character, numerous virtues and great deeds. After he had reached the zenith of his life and the climax of his usefulness, David fell into sin. He was perhaps fifty years of age when that happened. Had he died in battle before his fall, he would have gone down in history as a hero and without a blot on his escutcheon.

1. David looked lustfully.

Rising from an afternoon nap, which was customary in that part of the world, David leisurely walked in the fresh air on the roof of his palace. He made the mistake of looking into the courtyard of another man, and there he saw that man's wife, Bathsheba, a woman of remarkable beauty, bathing. He looked upon her repeatedly with lust in his heart. A look can be and often is sinful. In this connection Christ said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). That was the prelude to David's sin. It is the same way today, and many half-clad women are partially responsible for

this sin.

2. David coveted wrongfully.

The tenth commandment forbids every man to covet the wife of another. But David broke this commandment. Lusting after Bathsheba, David inquired about her, resolved to have her, and made plans to have her for his own.

3. David sinned greatly.

When David inquired about Bathsheba, one of his servants reminded him that she was the wife of another. Nevertheless, "David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her." For this premeditated, deliberate and dishonorable deed David was inexcusable. A fall so terrible as that of David does not occur all at once. It is generally preceded by a period of spiritual declension.

Conception followed the adultery, whereupon Bathsheba promptly reported her condition to David. In an attempt to shift the blame for her condition to another, and desirous of conveying to Uriah the impression that he had implicit confidence in his word, David summoned him to return from the scene of fighting, under the pretense of supplying his royal master with an accurate account of how the hostilities were proceeding. Not wanting it to become known that he was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba, David thought the best way to avoid that was to get her husband back to spend a little while at home, so that Uriah would be considered as the father of the child. Naturally, Uriah responded to the summons, but he consistently observed the custom of the people of the Middle East in that day by refusing to dwell with his wife at home during the time of war. In order that his purpose might not be thwarted, David caused Uriah to become intoxicated. He thought surely he could be influenced to go home while in a drunken stupor. This is an example of how far sin can carry a child of God when once he enters upon the downward path. But alas! even the best laid schemes of men often meet with disappointment.

After all of David's selfish and carnal efforts to use Uriah to conceal his own sin had failed, the king resorted to extreme measures. Just as the lust of the eye led David to commit adultery with Bathsheba, the pride of life influenced him to have Uriah slain in order to shield himself. Even though it meant sinking deeper in the mire of sin, David deliberately plotted the death of his devoted subject. With cold-blooded deliberation David penned a note to Joab, the commander of his army, ordering him to station his faithful soldier in the front line where he would be the most exposed to the assaults of the foe, and then desert him and leave him to his cruel and inevitable fate. Uriah carried the king's letter, which decreed his death, and delivered it to Joab, whereupon Joab did what David told him to do and Uriah was slain.

When Bathsheba was informed that Uriah had been killed, "she mourned for her husband." What vile mockery! Only God knows how often the outward "mourning" over the departed is but a hypocritical veil to cover satisfaction of heart for being rid of them. David then took Bathsheba as her wife. Concerning this whole affair God's Word says, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Don't forget that!

David broke five of the ten commandments. One commandment says, "Thou shalt

have no other gods before me." But David put the god of lust before the God of heaven. One commandment says, "Thou shalt not covet." But David coveted his neighbor's wife. One commandment says, "Thou shalt not steal." But David stole a woman who belonged to another man. One commandment says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But David committed this sin. Still another commandment says, "Thou shalt not kill." But David was responsible for the death of Uriah.

4. David became miserable eventually.

After Uriah's death David married Bathsheba, and for a while he seemed to forget how grievously he had sinned. Approximately a year later God sent Nathan, his faithful prophet, to deal with David. Very tactfully, skillfully and courageously Nathan told David a very stirring story of the injustice of one man to another. He told him about a man with great flocks who stole the only lamb of a poor man. David never applied any of the story to himself, but immediately pronounced sentence upon the rich man. Fearlessly and dramatically Nathan looked into the face of the lust-smeared and blood-stained king and said, "Thou art the man." What an indictment! How terrible was the blow of that accusation! David had sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, himself, his descendents, and most of all against God. Such a bold and unexpected application of the story shocked David and aroused his slumbering conscience. In order to convict of sin God always sends one of his messengers.

How did David react to the pronouncement of Nathan? Many men, had they been in David's position, would have had the prophet removed from their presence and executed. David did not deny the fact that he had committed these sins, as many have done under similar circumstances. He did not put the blame on Bathsheba, as others might have done. He was too conscious of his own guilt to blame her. David did not offer any excuses for what he had done. He did not seek to justify himself in any way. That is what most of us do when confronted with the fact that we have sinned. We usually try to offer some excuse or some explanation, no matter how trivial or how serious the matter may be.

5. David confessed his sins penitently.

David felt so badly about his sins that he was miserable. He certainly had what the psychiatrists of today call a "guilt complex." The Bible calls it conviction for sin. Both the Bible and the psychiatrists tell us that we must do something about it.

As is true of every person who does wrong, David's sins grieved God, hurt others and injured himself. Burdened greatly with the consciousness of his own sinfulness, David said, "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). David could not hide his sin from his view or erase it from his memory. In acknowledging his transgressions David used the plural because his sins included idolatry, covetousness, treachery, theft, adultery and murder. A transgression is a deliberate and willful violation of the expressed will of God.

It is not always easy to acknowledge that the sins we commit are our own.

We are prone to try to blame others for them. We attempt to place the blame for them anywhere except on ourselves. We blame the tendencies we have inherited, the training we have or have not received, the circumstances in which we have been placed or the temptations by which we have been assailed. But we find none of this sort of thing in David. He readily admitted that the guilt of his sins was his alone.

Abhorring himself and the sins which he had deliberately and willfully committed, and earnestly desiring to be cleansed, penitent David confessed his sins and sobbed out his prayer to God for forgiveness and restoration. He did not plead any mitigating circumstances whatsoever. Neither did he attempt to blame anybody for his sins. Out of the depths of his degradation he acknowledged the full measure of his wrongdoing and cried, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:1-2). After his honest confession of sin and earnest prayer for forgiveness, there was nothing more that David could do. God alone could do the rest.

David certainly played the fool by sinning as he did and he was chastised for his wrongdoing. He sinned in secret, but his chastisements were public. The harm which resulted from his sins could not be undone. Even to this day his sins have given occasion to the enemies of God to ridicule that which is holy. David's forgiveness and restoration did not exempt him from suffering certain consequences of his sins. Sin always leaves its tracks and scars on the life and record. Therefore, let us refrain from making the scars and daily pray for pardon, purify and power.