

"THOU ART THE MAN"

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man." II Samuel 12:7.

God's Word does not cover ugly, human guilt. It portrays both the strong points and the weaknesses of the servants of God. However, the sins of God's servants are not for us to hide behind or to use as excuses for our own evil deeds. Rather, they are recorded for our instruction. They are for us to lay to heart and to seek to avoid. The scriptural account of David's sin is an example of how the Word of God, as a warning to others, describes frankly and fully the failures of God's children.

It is now my task to comment on the darkest blot of all in the character of David. It certainly does not afford us any pleasure to gaze on an eminent saint of God befouling himself in the mire of evil. The inspired record of this event is to be regarded as a divine beacon, warning us of the rocks upon which David's life was wrecked; also, as a danger signal, bidding us to be on our guard, lest we, through unwatchfulness, experience a similar calamity.

David extended his kingdom by conquering his enemies round about. After that he reigned over all 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. Then, after he had reached the climax of his usefulness and the zenith of his life 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. Imagine how he would have served as an example of all the manly virtues.

David's tragic sin occurred when his kingdom was securely established and he was at the very height of his power. David seemingly had everything that an Oriental king might desire -- a wife, concubines, many major military victories, a prosperous nation over which to rule and, so far as we know, freedom from any great tension due to the pursuit of his enemies, the threat of bankruptcy or any other fear.

Military activities against the Ammonites were resumed upon the return of favorable spring weather. David, however, failed to perform his duty by going forth with Joab and his army. Previously he had been at the head of his army, but at the very time when he should have girded on his sword he forsook his post of duty. He preferred the ease of his luxurious palace to the hardships of the battlefield. Having decided to relax and follow the line of least resistance, David was not protected when the enemy assailed him. Nobody can enjoy the protection and blessing of God when he refrains from walking in the pathway of duty. While it is quite likely that David had dallied with thoughts of sin, it was not until he spent his time in idleness in the city that he fell into the depths of sin. Had he been engaged in improving himself or in striving to be helpful to others, he would have avoided the temptation to which he yielded.

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. Lusting after her, David inquired about her, whereupon 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 it 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 let 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. "Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house." He was not willing to give way to self-indulgence while his brethren were enduring the hardships of a military campaign. 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 his wife. Concerning this whole affair God's Word says, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

The account of these terrible sins was recorded in God's Word as a beacon to warn the mariner against some of the most deceitful and perilous rocks that are to be found in all the sea of life. It emphasizes the folly of dallying with sin even in thought. Admit sin within the precincts of the imagination and there is the possibility of its ultimately mastering the soul.

Even though God may permit His children to fall into sin, He will not leave them alone when they do so. In one way or another He will deal with them in order that they may be restored to fellowship with Him and be able to render useful and effective service for Him. In David's case God sent His faithful prophet to declare unto him his terrible personal guilt and the intense displeasure of God because of his dastardly conduct.

Approximately a year after David had sinned so grievously in this matter of Bathsheba and Uriah, in mercy God sent His faithful prophet to deal with him. Nathan did not decline the unwelcome and difficult assignment, but performed it to the best of his ability. His approach was very tactful. Skillfully

and bravely he related to the king one of the most touching parables in all literature. With simple pathos he 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. The portrayal was so graphic that it had an immediate effect. Readily seeing the injustice of the rich man, David immediately pronounced sentence upon him. I can visualize David biting his lips, clenching his fists and saying, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." David did not realize that this parable applied to him.

Although David listened attentively to Nathan's sermon, he never applied any of it to himself. Doubtless he reasoned something like this, "The preacher is certainly digging up that scoundrel who has stolen that lamb, whoever he is." David is a splendid illustration of the fact that it is so much easier to go into a rage about the sins of others than it is to be indignant on account of our own transgressions.

Just then Nathan did a tremendously courageous thing. Fearlessly and dramatically he looked into the face of the lust-smearred and blood-stained king and said, "Thou art the man." What an indictment! How terrible was the blow of that accusation! He declared that the seeds sown by David would bring forth a harvest of adultery and murder among his own descendants. Such a bold and unexpected application of the story shocked David and aroused his slumbering conscience. It was quite evident to him that his sins, which he had long thought were kept secret, were well known to his most influential and incorruptible subject and friend, the prophet, and that God was speaking through him directly to his conscience. Before the shocked king could speak, the prophet reminded him of the honors, privileges and blessings which God had showered upon him, or was ready to grant unto him if they were needed.

It must have shocked David greatly to hear these words, "Thou art the man," when they were spoken so unhesitatingly and faithfully by the prophet of God. These words must have gone like an arrow to David's conscience. He had sinned against God, against Uriah, against Bathsheba, against himself and against his posterity. Meanwhile, he had tried to keep up a good appearance and act as if he were all that he had ever been. All the time he was uncomfortable and wretched within, ever lacking in self-respect because of his secret sins.

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.

Instead of trying to minimize his guilt or to justify himself, David promptly and frankly confessed that he had sinned against the Lord.

Nathan's rebuke brought David face to face with the enormity of his guilt and enabled him to see the ugliness and blackness of the sin when he thought another had committed it. It is always much easier to see the faults and

sins of others than it is to see our own. It required a divine messenger to remove the veil and show David the ugliness of his own sin. We, too, need a divine messenger to disclose our sins and to declare God's sentence.

Abhorring himself and the sins which he had deliberately and wilfully committed, David fell on his face in genuine repentance, 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. He freely and frankly confessed that he had sinned against the Lord. He acknowledged the full measure of his wrongdoing. According to Psalm 32, prior to Nathan's rebuke David's conscience had bothered him, but he had still thought that he could get by without confessing his sin. But his sins required confession before they could be forgiven.

Realizing full well that his sins had wronged God more than they had injured others, David declared, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Out of the depths of his degradation he cried, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness." After his confession of sin and earnest prayer for forgiveness, there was nothing more that David could do. God did the rest. As soon as there is frank confession and true repentance God puts away the sin, even though it may have been of the foulest sort. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." However, this is not to encourage us to sin, but to help us to understand that, if we have sinned and are truly sorry for it, God stands ready to forgive.

David certainly played the fool by sinning as he did and he was chastised for his wrong-doing. 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, purity and power.