

2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15

In the 23rd chapter of Jeremiah, God speaks these frightening words through His prophet: “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture... They say, ‘You will have peace’ to those who despise Me; they say, ‘No calamity will come to you’ to those who walk in the stubbornness of their own heart.” The prophet Nathan was no such shepherd. After King David sinned against God, Nathan fearlessly confronted him with the wickedness of his actions. He got right up into his face with the words: “You are the man!”

It didn’t bother Nathan that David was the king. It didn’t matter to him that David had the power to toss him into prison and throw away the key. He could have put Nathan to death, as he had done to Uriah. Yet, Nathan did not back down from his purpose—and David, today, is eternally grateful; for if Nathan had not confronted the king, David would have perished in hell.

But at that time King David wanted nothing to do with Nathan. He had lusted after Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. The lust took over his heart and David committed sexual sin with her. To cover up his wickedness, He had Uriah killed.

It was now almost one year later. David was continuing his life as before. All appeared to be well. The beautiful Bathsheba was now his wife. They were having a baby. Things were looking good...except for the fact that David was living in unrepentant sin. He was refusing to admit that he had done wrong. To live in unrepentant sin is to live without faith in the One who forgives sin. David was on the road to hell, but he wouldn’t admit it, and he was helpless to stop it. And so God sent Nathan to him, not out of anger but out of mercy. For had God left David alone, he would have perished with his unrepentant heart.

There isn’t one of us sitting here today who can go through life without a “Nathan.” We do not have the power within us to convert ourselves to the faith. We are unable to rise from our sins and believe in the One who forgives sin. Sin had David in its grasp and he was unable to free himself. The Word of God had to be preached to him by Nathan. There was the power of God to bring David back to life again. And there in that Word is God’s power at work in your life.

Maybe you haven’t committed adultery and murder like David did...or maybe you have. Perhaps the sin of greed has taken over your life. Perhaps envy and jealousy, or worry and fretting have taken control of you. It matters not what sin it is. If you pass off your sins as nothing; if you do not apply to yourself the words: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” then let this “Nathan” speak to you today. Do not turn a deaf ear to the Word of God. Know for a fact that God is being merciful to you when He says: “You are the man!” Don’t look at your spouse, your child, your parent. Don’t blame your neighbor, your boss, the person in the next pew. It’s not the devil’s fault. It’s not the fault of society. It’s your fault! It’s my fault! You have sinned against God, and so have I. David pronounced his own sentence, “Death to the man who did this!” And that is what you deserve and I deserve.

Do not live in unrepentant sin. Do not think of your sins so lightly. God’s judgment is sure and certain—eternal death to the one who sins. And God’s Word says to each one of us: “You are the man! You deserve to die!”

In His mercy, God led David to repent of his sin. This wasn't David's idea. He would rather have gone on living in sin. But through Nathan, God intervened. And from David's mouth came the words, "I have sinned against the Lord." Upon this his confession, Nathan spoke these words to him: The Lord has taken away your sin. David, you are forgiven. Your sins of adultery and murder and living an unrepentant life are forgiven.

These words are for you today, friend. To each one of you sitting here, this "Nathan" has the privilege of declaring: The Lord has taken away your sin. You are forgiven. Whatever sins you have done, be they adultery, murder, envy, jealousy, worry, covetousness, cursing—every one of your sins is forgiven. You have God's Word on it.

It's not that God overlooks what you have done. He did not overlook David's sin—He forgave it. And He forgives you because Jesus Christ went to the cross in your place. God the Father beheld His Son on the cross and said: You are the Man! You are the sinner! You, My Son, are the adulterer and murderer. You are the thief and coveter and worrier. You are the Man!

And God punished His Son for what you and I have done. God punished His Son for what David had done. And that's why David was forgiven. And that's why you today are forgiven children of God—because Jesus became the "Man"—the sinner in your place.

Now since David was forgiven, we might wonder why God struck his child so that he died. We might be tempted to believe that God was punishing David for his sins of adultery and murder. We may wonder the same things about ourselves. Does God punish us for our sins even though we are His baptized, forgiven children? It may seem that He does; that He allows us to suffer and that these sufferings are punishments for what we have done.

Friend, God does not punish you for your sins. He only forgives you. He already punished Jesus in your place. King David was not being punished when God took the life of his child. Rather, it was an act of mercy toward David. It may be difficult for us to understand this, but God wanted David to suffer in this way so that for the rest of his life he would remember how truly weak and sinful he was. God was teaching David, by taking his child in death, that he lived only by the grace of God.

We see this today in the life of a forgiven drunkard; a man who, by the grace of God, has stopped his life of drinking and believes that he is forgiven of his sins—and yet he still suffers, day after day, from a diseased liver. This is not to punish him but to teach him that he is weak and sinful (even though forgiven), and that he can live each day, not from a bottle, but in the grace and mercy of Christ alone.

You and I may carry in our bodies the battle-scars of past sins. We may have haunting memories of wickedness from our past. God may allow us to suffer with such memories, scars, and afflictions, but be assured that He is not punishing you. Rather, in mercy these afflictions are a painful reminder that you and I are weak and can easily fall into sin; and so we can live only by His grace and mercy toward us.

We are no different from King David. He needed a painful reminder to trust in the mercy of God. And we also need the same thing. David needed a "Nathan" to preach God's

Word to him, and he needed suffering in his life so that he would learn to live by God's grace alone. May God give to us such "Nathan's" and afflictions that we also live, not in sin, but in His grace; forgiven in Christ Jesus—grasped, not by our sins, but by our Savior, who in love is leading us to our heavenly home. Amen.