

Injustice, Inequity & Death

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Well, if you would open your Bibles to 2 Samuel 11 and 12, pages 262.

And 262, if you'd like to follow on. As you do that, I want to welcome you and say that if this is your first time here, you've hit the triple crown, the triple first prize.

Not only is it baptism, not only is it Mother's Day, but we get David and Bathsheba thrown into the equation. So congratulations. And this is why Dan sets the roster and I don't.

So welcome. Now, this is one of the most famous and sordid stories in the Bible, which is why I get so much interest in art and film.

And it's a bit of a dangerous story because as you read it, it's like being in one of those places where you take a number and you're waiting and you're waiting and all of a sudden you realize people have called your number and they're talking about you and pointing at you because the passage is about us.

[1 : 15] And I just warn you about this as we come through the passage because the first temptation is to stand up on our own self-righteousness and think that we are somehow better than David, that if we were in his position, we would never have done this.

I mean, this is God's king. He has every privilege. He's been chosen by God. He's a man after God's own heart. He's been anointed by the Holy Spirit.

He's been protected by God. And he now rules over a united Israel. And he commands fierce loyalty amongst the men whom he leads.

And he's got a great interest in the arts. And just three chapters ago in chapter 7, God made a special covenant promise to King David where he adopted him as his own son.

And he promised that he would have a descendant who would be the eternal Messiah, the eternal king. And remember, David was so gobsmacked by the grace of God that he couldn't find words.

[2 : 16] And between chapter 7 and chapter 11, where we begin our story, David has carried everything before him. Everything he touches turns to gold. He wins every victory.

He rules with justice, equity, and as we saw last week, incredible kindness. But in the space of this one chapter, David takes, I count seven of God's ten commandments and goes out the window. And what happens through these two chapters is he changes the course of the history of God's people. And these chapters change the rest of 2 Samuel and the rest of the Old Testament until we come to the time of Christ.

But again, I warn that our first temptation will be to say, I'd never do that. And if you start feeling that, just know that you're in exactly David's position.

So it's a story about what's in our heart and what's in God's heart. And the two chapters, chapter 11 and chapter 12, are two different ways of dealing with sin.

[3 : 23] S-I-N. And I've called chapter 11 the reality distortion field. I'm reading Steve Job's biography right now.

He's one of the founders of Apple computers. He died recently. And in the early days, one of the Apple engineers described Job's as having a reality distortion field, which meant that he was able to create things and create worlds by sheer mental force.

And at its best, it meant that Job's was able to persuade people to be able to do things they didn't think that they could do by a combination of his charismatic personality and by manipulation and by the force of will, which incidentally is why we're all slaves to iPods, iPads and iPhones.

But at its worst, it was just complete self-deception, delusion and lies, a refusal to accept fact. So Job's had a child out of wedlock and refused to acknowledge her for years.

This is the way that we deal with sin, the reality distortion field. And I want to show you how it works. Look down at chapter 11, verse 1. In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle

because the ground is dry, David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel.

[4 : 49] They ravaged the Ammonites' besiege, but David remained at Jerusalem. So the passage opens with David's royal prerogative and his prerogative is in this word, sent. He sends his commander, his top general Joab and all Israel to fight, but he remains at home, remains in Jerusalem for no good reason.

While the others are risking their life, he's back in Jerusalem killing time. Verse 2. It happened late one afternoon when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house that he saw from the roof a woman bathing and she was very beautiful.

What's he doing? He's lounging, he's loitering and after the extended siesta, he sees a very beautiful woman naked on the next roof. Verse 3. And David sent, there's the word again, and inquired about the woman and one said, is it not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

Again, he sends, wants to find out who this woman is and Bathsheba is introduced to us in two ways. She's a daughter and she's a wife.

She's the daughter of Eliam and she's the wife of Uriah. She is not just the object of David's voyeurism. She's a woman who comes in a web of relationships as a wife and daughter.

[6 : 08] And then verse 4, the fourth time, David exercises his royal sending power. So David sent messengers and took her and she came to him and lay with him.

And thankfully, we're spared the details. There's no dialogue, there's no talk, it's all action, all verbs, sent, took, lay. And we know nothing about Bathsheba, really, we know nothing about her motivation.

David's power is unchallenged until verse 5, when Bathsheba does her own sending. Verse 5, the woman conceived, she sent and told David, I am pregnant.

In the Hebrew, two little words, I am pregnant and David's power comes crashing down. David, who had power over armies and kingdoms, he has no power over sin.

And what follows in chapter 11 is a desperate, panicked attempt, a ruthless and cynical attempt to cover his tracks. And David tries with all his might to create a reality distortion field around himself.

[7 : 17] In fact, he makes two attempts and each attempt gets him caught deeper in the net of his own fantasy. The first attempt is that next paragraph, verses 6 to 13 and it starts again with David sending and bringing Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, back from the battle so that Uriah might have sex with his wife so that David's adultery won't be discovered.

That's the plan. But when Uriah, so when Uriah arrives, David fakes great concern for the battle. It's a brilliant display. I mean, it's complete hypocrisy.

And when he finishes the meal, he says to Uriah, oh, by the way, he says, why don't I go home and sleep tonight? You deserve it. But David's plan does not take account of Uriah's character. Uriah, he's not even a Hittite.

He's not even an Israelite. He's a Hittite. But he has more concern for God and God's cause than David does. You can see that in verse 11. How can I do this?

The ark and God's people are out in the battlefield. With every syllable, he indicts King David. And plan A fails. So David moves very quickly to plan B.

[8 : 24] And that's in the next paragraph, 14. It's more ruthless and it's a success. Again, David uses his power of sending, verse 14. This time, he sends Uriah back to the battle and in his hand in a sealed envelope or whatever they used is Uriah's signed death warrant.

And Joab, who is a willing hatchet man, murders David, has him murdered by the sword of the Ammonites. This is, you may not know this, but Uriah was one of David's mighty men.

He joined him when he was in the wilderness at his most desperate phase. Uriah had put his life on the line to defend David. But such is David's desperation now to cover his sin and cover his tracks.

It means absolutely nothing. And Uriah is killed. And I want to read the last two verses of the chapter but not the last phrase. So try not to read the last phrase.

I know by telling you that you're going to. We'll read in a second. Verse 26, When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah, her husband, was dead, she lamented over her husband. And when the morning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife and bore him a son, full stop.

[9 : 43] And his cover-up has worked perfectly. And in a moment of deep cynicism, David takes the grieving widow in, has the son, no one's wiser, he's got away with murder.

The pregnancy's dealt with, Uriah's no longer a problem, Bathsheba's in the bedroom, it's been hidden from the public and David can act like an innocent man, back to business as usual and no one's going to know the difference.

And that is the way our reality distortion field works. I discovered that phrase, reality distortion field, comes from a Star Trek episode.

For those of you who've never seen Star Trek, Dan has the whole series and very happy to lend it out. And in research to this, I had Dan watch it and the episodes are about an evil species of aliens who capture humans to breed them as slaves and experiment them on their own planet.

And what they do is they cast a reality distortion field around that planet and the way they trap humans is they create illusions out of our own desires and thoughts so that the humans see only what they really want to see and so the mental image becomes like a narcotic.

[11:09] In reality, the person is trapped in a cage on a barren planet but they're living out their delusions. And right up to the very last phrase of chapter 11, David has just about everyone deluded.

He's used his power, he's abused his power, he's slept with Bathsheba, he's murdered his husband, he's covered it because he had the power to do it. And then we come to verse 27. There's only one problem and the problem's God. And the last phrase is, the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. In the Hebrew, it literally reads, the thing David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

It's an amazing statement because we're allowed into the heart of God. God has not been mentioned once in this chapter and now we're allowed into his inner thoughts.

David had deceived himself, he'd deceived his court, he'd deceived just about everyone around him but he'd built a cage for himself because as God looked on him, what he'd done was evil.

[12:22] And brothers and sisters, this is the way sin works for us. The New Testament warns us not to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Sin always creates distortion and denial and damage and we become slaves of our desires because we don't see what we're doing as sin.

It's like a narcotic and we enslave ourselves. And we are personally, culturally and socially so committed to these reality distortion fields that we create the conditions so that the distortions and the denials will flourish.

You think about it, think about the radical relativism which we breathe on the west coast here. We're no longer allowed to call things wrong. You want to stop a conversation?

Say something's wrong. We're not allowed to use the word evil anymore. You can say you're personally offended or most often you just say, well, that's inappropriate. But you know what it is.

[13:26] You feel the resistance to saying, oh, I think that's wrong. And that resistance is a reality distortion field. It's the same one operating in the Garden of Eden when Satan suggested to Adam and Eve that God had it wrong about the tree.

And that what looks good and what feels good is your own personal way to fulfillment. another part of our reality distortion field is the idea that if anyone does something very evil, commits an atrocity, for example, it's because of their circumstances.

Something has happened to that person which makes them that way, they've lived in tough conditions, they haven't had the advantages. It's a lie. It's another reality distortion.

It's a way of me saying I'm not as bad as that person, I'd never do what that person does. And I remind you, and you may have never heard this before, Jesus says the problem is not outside us, the problem is inside me and it's inside you, it's the problem of our hearts.

Jesus said from within, from inside, out of the heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, inverse slander, pride, foolishness, they come from within.

[14:46] And no amount of wonderful circumstances or good breeding or education or anger management is going to deal with that. So, how does God deal with sin?

What can save us from our reality distortion fields we're so good at building? And I've called chapter 12, the reality of God revealed.

There's only one way to deal with sin. We have to deal with God. And the first thing God does is he gives David another pair of eyes because he has to break through the barrier of our deception and the way God does that is through his word.

It's very interesting. If you look at chapter 12, verse 1, God has waited a year before sending the prophet Nathan to speak his word to David.

One of the commentators says, things take a radical turn for the better when David's pastor shows up and preaches a sermon. But notice how the sermon starts. Nathan doesn't go straight at David and say, you're a disgusting king.

[15:56] And some commentators think that Nathan is very clever in doing this, that this is the way you speak truth to power. Don't go directly at the person you tell stories.

But Nathan is only doing what God has directed. And the use of the parable is not Nathan's being so clever, it's because of the stubborn resistance and deceptiveness of our own hearts.

Do you know the Bible says, and I quote, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick? Who can understand it? So the parable is not a good technique for the preacher, it's about our instantaneous and infinitely creative ability for self justification.

That's very clever. It's a little parable about entitlement. He says, here's a case for you to consider, O king, two men, one has everything, money, power, enough flocks and sheep, more than he could eat in a lifetime.

The other is poor, has one little sheep who he treasures, and in an act of callousness and injustice, the wealthy guy just takes that one sheep that the guy has and has a barbecue with it for a visiting friend.

[17:07] And David explodes. How dare this wretched wretch, how dare he take what is not his and treat it as though it's his? And what for? For lunch? Bring him here, he deserves to die.

There's a book that was written a few years ago called Cat and Dog Theology. I don't know, again I found it on Dan's bookshelf. It's a very good book.

Because cats and dogs relate to their masters differently. Dog comes to you and he says, you feed me, you house me, you care for me, you must be God. And the cat comes to you and says, you house me, you feed me, you care for me, I must be God.

Those of you who had cats are laughing. You know the idea, the dog says I exist to serve you and the cat says you exist to serve me. Well our default way of relating to God is cat theology.

And so the first step God has to do is he has to puncture our self righteousness and the way he does that is by enabling us to see ourselves through different eyes. And when we begin to see ourselves through different eyes, the first reaction is to flame up in self righteousness and indignation because we hate in others what we see in ourselves.

[18:31] If you're a proud person, you can't stand proud people. If you're a bitter person, the one person you don't want to speak to is a bitter person. And then in verse 7, Nathan says, you are the man.

Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel. I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and Judah.

And if that were not too much, I would have added to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord to do what is evil in his sight? You struck down your eye, the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife to be your wife and killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

God always says to us, you are the man, you are the woman. One of the commentators says this, God's word, however it begins and however long it takes to get there, always ends up to direct and personal.

Me, you. The word of God is not about somebody else. It's not a general abstract truth, it's personal address. You, me, who you are, what you've done, who I am, what I've done.

[19:57] And I think it's a marvel to see how God deals with David. He doesn't crush him, he doesn't just zap him. God reveals himself to David in both grace and in holiness because God's intention is to restore David, to bring him back to himself.

And that's God's intention with you and me as well. As you take God's grace, as soon as Nathan say, you are the man, then God gets very personally, he says, I anointed you, I delivered you, I gave you, I gave you, I gave you, I would have given you three times the blessing.

Sin is the most profound form of ingratitude, which is why we cannot deal with sin apart from dealing with God. And so God reminds us of his grace.

And Sunday by Sunday he reminds us of his grace. Everything you have and everything you are comes from me, he says. And then he tells David the truth, he confronts him with his holiness. You

murdered Uriah, you took his wife and you murdered Uriah with the sword of the Ammonites. And in doing that David, you have despised me. In disobeying my commandments, you despise God. And that is the reality and the evil of sin.

[21 : 21] And the sign that we despise God is that we despise our neighbor and before God we are powerless to cover it up, to clean it up or to climb out of it.

And that's why God reveals himself to David and that's why he reveals himself to us. For our healing, for our restoration and for our renewal. Notice, and those of you in Bible study groups will know this in verses 11 and 12 of that chapter, God doesn't just wave a magic wand and dispense with the human consequences of David's sin.

You know this in your own life. There are human consequences to sin and we'll see them in full technicolor in the next few weeks. But what God does is this, he does not just announce what's wrong.

He does not just point out our self-deception. He gives to David and he gives to us the power to break free from the distortion that we created through forgiveness.

It's very important. Verse 13, David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, the Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die.

[22 : 35] It's a brilliant moment. No loopholes anymore. No prevarication. David could become defensive and angry, but in Hebrew he says just two words which are I've sinned against the law, the Lord.

And then Nathan says the words of breathtaking power, the words that change everything. God has put away your sin. You see, it's one thing to be shown how far you've slipped.

It's one thing to see the holiness of God and how far away from it we are. It's another thing entirely to be reunited with God and have our sins put away.

If you like, in the Star Trek analogy, the truth of God's holiness wakes us up to the fact that we're in danger on the planet and it can break some of the power of the distortion field, but it cannot lift us up from the planet and take us back to earth.

Only forgiveness can do that because forgiveness unites us with God. And I want to finish with just two comments on this word of forgiveness for you to take away and think about.

[23 : 49] Forgiveness opens the door to transformation. David's done a huge amount of damage and he's only said two words here, I've sinned against the Lord.

But although God's promise of forgiveness is clear and absolute, black and white, because David's cat theology runs very deep and so does ours, he takes time to work forgiveness into his life.

And I want you, if you will, if you have your Bible open, turn right to Psalm 51. I have it on page 474. Can you see the title of Psalm 51?

to the choir master, a psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone into Bathsheba. Can you understand what's happening?

David's heard the word of forgiveness but our cat theology, his entitlement theology runs so deep that the word of forgiveness has opened the door for him now to go deeper and it's only the word of forgiveness that can enable us to face the true reality of our sin and our darkness.

[25 : 09] Verse 1, have mercy on me, O God. He's already heard forgiveness according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, brought out my transgressions, washed me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleansed me from my sin.

See, forgiveness is not the final point. Forgiveness is not meant to be the final point. It's not like, it's not a mechanism by which we reboot a computer. it's the basis of real change and transformation because by forgiveness we come back to God and forgiveness gives us a place to stand before God, innocent, clean before him and now we can face who we really are.

I don't know if I'm explaining this. I think one picture of the Christian life is that we go out and we fail and we fail and we come back and we repent and we be forgiven and we just go on like that week after week after week and forgiveness becomes a kind of a mechanism just to keep the treadmill going.

Some of us might have been doing this for 50 years, dogged by some sin, you've tried just about everything, you've gone to conferences, you've prayed overnight, but you don't seem to be able to draw near to the power of God.

You see what David is doing here after the word of forgiveness, he's going deeper because he now has a place to stand to examine his darkness, complete acceptance for God.

[26 : 30] Do you understand? It's not that forgiveness is not clear, it is clear, but you see it's so easy for us to slip back into our reality distortion field. God's grace, God's kindness and God's acceptance is not just letting us off the hook, it's not just turning over a new leaf and trying harder, it enables David to see the blasphemy of his arrogance, to see the truth and grubbiness of his own heart without despairing, without being consumed.

And so in verse six he says, you delight in truth in the inward being, you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Forgiveness is where transformation takes place.

When God forgives me, I can now face the truth that I've despised God without fear of him, without fear of him rejecting me. it's only when God forgives me I can deal with the fact that I've scorned him.

This is what it is. I hope you know this. I hope you know the reality of being able to pray for a clean heart within you. The freedom of God revealing his holiness and his grace at the same time. The joy of being able to stand on a base of forgiveness and not your own self righteousness.

Forgiveness leads to transformation. transformation. And secondly and finally, we have to come to Jesus, don't we? I mean you can't come away from this chapter without thinking we need a much better Messiah than David.

[28 : 04] He's just like us. He needs a saviour just like we do. And when the New Testament opened, Jesus comes as the one who brings complete forgiveness of sins.

He is entirely without sin. He never despised the word of the Lord. His heart was utterly clean. And as he dies on the cross, God takes my sin and places them on him so that we might be forgiven.

This is what it's all about. And when he was raised from the dead, he said, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in my name for the forgiveness of sins.

That's what we celebrated today. Dan said, baptism, that's a sign we're united with Jesus. We've joined him in his death and his resurrection. This is the ultimate place for us to stand in Jesus Christ, which is why it's such a happy thing.

Because in Christ is forgiveness. In Christ is the delight of God and the joy of salvation. And that's what God wants for you. And that's what he wants for me. And that's what he wants for Vancouver.

[29 : 09] So let's kneel and pray. we acknowledge and praise you, dear heavenly father, as our wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

Thank you, dear heavenly father, for the gritty honesty of this, your word. May your truth penetrate our hearts anew that you accept those who have stumbled and fallen and more.

You use for your glory, the broken and the weak. For such are we. We confess the ease with which we lapse into thinking that only in performing well can we be accepted by you or used by you.

We confess the ease with which we fall into despondency, shame or regret when we slip up, believing the lie that you do not accept us, cannot renew us, cannot use us in our weakness.

We confess the ease with which we think when life in this world is going well, that we can walk ignoring you. We acknowledge that we have fallen short, have missed the mark, and we rejoice and praise you for your strong arms of love there to receive us and to revive us.

[30 : 43] Lord, in your mercy. We pray for our world, for its perplexing political, economic, social, and military situations.

We praise you that your power and wisdom is greater than this world's confounding perplexity. We praise you, Lord, that throughout the world you are alive in the lives of believers who, against immense odds, remain faithful to you and live in the light of your love.

We ask that world leaders would hear your voice and submit so that your word can go forth even more widely, and relief for those who suffer would increase. And we pray for your hand of strength and comfort to the millions of small churches everywhere, that wherever two or more are gathered in your name, they would know your grace and your love and be built up to rely on you and to love others.

Lord, in your mercy. Amen. We pray this morning for the missionaries you have called out from this church and equipped for your work locally. We pray for Richie Spidell with navigators and for Kristen Rumerie with living waters.

Overseas, we pray for Jeremy Curry with Youth with a Mission and for Janine and Philippe Lafleur with InterServe and IFES in Central Asia. Today also we ask your gracious hand on two of the parishes in the Anglican Network in Canada.

[32 : 09] We remember Grace Anglican Church in Mississippi Mills and the Church of the Messiah in Ottawa. We ask that you would protect, inspire, and guide these workers and these parishes as they proclaim the gospel to those in their midst with both words and their lives.

Lord, in your mercy. We pray for this province, for this city, for our communities. In this city, in our places of work, in our families, in our volunteer involvements, in the life of this church as part of the Anglican Network, we ask for the touch of your grace and peace.

Empower us to trust that your plan is unfolding under your will. Calm us to rest in you such that we do not fear or despair, but continue in deep hope, serving as your ambassadors wherever you call us or place us.

We pray that your spirit will be present to build us up and minister through us at upcoming events that many of us will attend. The graduations, weddings, reunions, vacation trips, conferences, homecomings, and others.

May your glory, dear Lord, be so large in our minds that our hearts remain soft to you such that we trust you daily, invite you into every relationship, hand over to you every challenge and trial, and allow your gospel to be lived through us.

[33 : 37] Lord, in your mercy. Here in our church, Lord, we are thankful for the steady commitment and energy of so many. We pray for our leaders, for David and Dan.

We pray for James and the spiritual care ministries, for David and the youth ministries, for Eric and the Artizo ministry, for Terry and the music ministry. We pray for strength and wisdom for the Sunday school teachers and workers and for all who are preparing the summer ministries with children.

Be with those planning the women's retreat and guide every one of us as participants in the St. John's visioning process. We pray again with thanksgiving and joy for Varun and Vibar, who were baptized here today, that you will hold them tightly throughout their lives.

We ask your healing hand on those who are ill and on those who face difficult and stressful emotional, physical, or financial situations. We remember these by name.

Rowena, Derek, Susan, Marguerite, Chris, and Brian. And we ask that the light of your truth and the depth of your love may brighten and touch those we now raise before you privately in silence.

[35 : 03] Lord, in your mercy. In closing, dear Lord, we rejoice again that you are our rock and we are safe building our lives upon you, a church at rest in you, clinging to you in the midst of any storm after any stumble and also whenever smooth waters would tempt us to drift away.

We bow before you and honor you that you accept us in our brokenness. You protect us, guide us, reveal more and more of your unfathomable love to us.

You hold us firmly in your deep peace and you use us in our weakness to bring glory to yourself. To you be all honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Well, as we close our service, I just want to draw your attention to announcements to the things that are happening in the life of the parish.

Yes. Amen. Amen. Amen. Bye. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Asia.

[36 : 28] Yes. Amen.