

It Happened Late One Afternoon

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[0 : 00] My sinful heart wants to just tell you you're okay and I'm okay and everyone's fine. Let's just get on with our lives and, you know, live the West Coast dream. But passages like this, they stop us in our tracks.

And they ask us to reflect greatly on who we are. So, let's get into it. Okay, so the story begins by reminding us that everything happens during a time of war with Ammon.

We'll come back to that later. In contrast to the previous chapters, do you remember last week there was about four or five battles that happened really just like that, right? Bam, bam, bam.

And so they covered great swaths of time very, very quickly. And in this passage, these two chapters, everything slows down. Everything slows down. It happened late one afternoon.

This is verse 2. It happened late one afternoon. David arose from his couch. He saw from the roof a woman bathing. She was very beautiful.

[1 : 05] It all happens very quickly. The verbs here, as one commentator put it, the verbs rush through the next events, verses 2 to 5. He saw. He sent.

He took. He lay. She returned. Now, we don't know anything about her, really. She has a name. We know she's married to Uriah.

Did she fight him? Was this rape? Did she expose herself on purpose? Did she seduce him, perhaps, thinking this was a great kind of little fling she could have?

You know, we have no idea what happened here. But the way the passage is written, it makes, there is a sense about it in which she is just this object of his lust.

You know, she gets one sentence, right? And the sentence is, I am pregnant. In verse 5. She is this object that David wants. He is not driven by hesed, like he was last week, by loving kindness, but by desire, by lust.

[2 : 11] And the warning of this passage touches all of us, I think. And the warning is this, how suddenly and fatally we can fall. And it's scary, because I understand this.

And you should understand this as well. And if you say, goodness, that's a bit extreme, Roberts, you know, like, I could never do anything like that. Then I believe you've taken your first step towards committing some terrible sin.

I was reading recently, for some reason, an article on German female prison guards. And in World War II, right?

I was just trying to think of, I was thinking about, you know, I was thinking about the human heart. And I was wondering, I wonder if there was any female prison guards in Auschwitz, you know.

I wonder if there's any females that participated in this kind of thing. You know, being kind of motherly and stuff, surely they wouldn't do anything like that. Apparently there were a lot. And they recruited them from the newspaper.

[3 : 20] And they didn't say, hey, you know, do you hate Jewish people? Are you a sadist? Do you want to kill people? They appealed to people's sort of pride and stuff. And they got a lot of people responding.

And they were just very normal women. And I read up on them. And they were hairdressers. It says, streetcar ticket takers, opera singers, retired teachers that did these awful things.

People like you, people like me, did bad things. I'm going to come back to that later on. Because I think that's a major theme in this passage. Okay, back to the story. I am pregnant.

David hears. So David jumps into control mode. This is, let's call this scene two. David jumps into control mode, verses six to 21.

What's he going to do about this unexpected consequence, this child? Well, plan one. He has three plans. The first one, he gets Uriah back from the front. He's one of his mighty men, one of his warriors.

[4 : 20] Gets him back from the front. Has this chat to him. Hey, I just wanted to see if everything's okay. How's it going up the front? How's your boss? Is the battle going well? Is everything fine? Fine. And I mean, it's all a total ruse, right?

Like, he basically wants to get him back, hoping that Uriah will sleep with his wife whilst he's back for a little holiday. And that way it sort of covers up the whole pregnancy thing, right?

But Uriah doesn't go back to his house. He sleeps, it says, outside the door of the castle with the servants. And David asks why. He says, well, I mean, there was this kind of rule, right? No sex during warfare.

But what Uriah says is like, how can I enjoy my home when all my mates and comrades are sleeping in fields? You know, it's just not right. So Uriah's presented is actually quite a wonderful, faithful man in contrast to David.

So that doesn't work. So David invites him back up again for a big meal and gets him drunk, thinking that, well, maybe if I get the guy drunk, he'll kind of ease up on his, you know, no sex during warfare kind of rule.

[5 : 22] And he'll be feeling a bit frisky once he gets a few, you know, tankards back in him. And it doesn't work. He just staggers to the couch and sleeps there the night. So David really steps it up this time.

He goes, you know, I've got to sort this out. So he calls Joab in, who's his, you know, is like his lieutenant, who's this, who obviously will do anything for David.

And he says to Joab, okay, mate, next time you attack Ammon, you know, get one group ahead of all the others. Put Uriah in that group so that he'll die.

You know, basically push those guys right out the front. Recall a few of them back. Uriah's by himself. Bam. Problem solved. Which is exactly what happens. And the death of Uriah is highlighted in the text.

It's mentioned like five or six times. It says this guy died. Let's kill him. He's died. He's died. He's dead. And then that guy died, et cetera, you know. So it's trying to put the blame on David here.

[6 : 19] David clearly killed this guy, one of his mighty men. It's just, I mean, most of you guys know this story, I'm sure, you know. But it still shocks us.

It still shocks me. I mean, this is the guy that wrote the Psalms. The guy that wrote the beautiful Psalms, right? He did this. It's an ugly story of abuse of power, of coveting, of lying, of adultery, of murder.

And the guy breaks half the Ten Commandments, you know, just in one go. Well, what does it teach us? I think one of the things it teaches us, and why it was so uncomfortable.

I enjoy writing sermons. I go to region on Monday mornings, and I enjoy it. I sit there all day. I meet a few people, you know, in the atrium and stuff.

But mostly I'm just sitting there. I'm studying the passage. I really like it. I do that on Mondays. This Monday just gone, studying this passage, did not have fun at all.

[7 : 28] And the reason I didn't have fun was not because I was really upset about the injustice of it, although I kind of was. I wasn't angry at David, you know, like, although I kind of was. The main thing, the main reason I didn't enjoy it, because it was just so exposing.

Any pretense that I had that I could not do something like this, given the equivalent resources, was peeled away. What does it teach us?

It teaches us that, that, you know, good people are capable of some of the worst things. And certainly, you know, big names, big biblical names have done awful things.

It's not just David, you know, Jacob, Moses, Abraham. You're not better than those folks. I'm sure you don't think that. And if you think you are, if you feel superior, if your esteem, your self-esteem rests on the idea that you are better, then you, how do I say it, you screen out the reality of what your heart is capable of.

So, before moving on, a quick, quick application here. Team, do not put up with minor sins in your heart. Do not get comfortable with self-pity, with sexual fantasies, with envy, with pride, with fantasies of revenge.

[9 : 02] These are little seeds which can act out in terrible ways if you let them grow. And to use an old phrase, you know, it's easier to crush an acorn than fell an oak tree.

So, get serious about these things which are minor in your hearts because, mate, they stick around, they fester, they grow. Okay, scene three, verses 26 to 27.

Bathsheba gets a telegram from the war office about her husband. She laments for a predetermined amount of time. That was an acceptable amount of time. David, again, sins for her.

She becomes his wife, bears him a son. And then in the final sentence, we hear from God for the first time in this story. The scene ends with these words.

The things that David had done displeased the Lord. So, God may have been silent, but he was not blind to what was happening. Scene four, chapter 12, we're in chapter 12, verses 1 to 15.

[10 : 04] Now, the word sent is used about 12 times in chapter 11. In chapter 12 here, it's one of the first words. God sent Nathan to David.

So, David has sort of been in control, managing the situation here. And now it is God that shifts into action. I mean, it's exciting, right?

God sends Nathan to David. We want justice, retribution. We want comeuppance. But what we find is grace, which is God's something for nothing.

When we deserve, we don't deserve anything, you know. Well, let's see how this unfolds. Okay, so Nathan relates a story to David. Now, David being the king is kind of acts like a justice as well. So, people will bring cases to him of things that have happened and he rules on them.

So, it's not unusual that Nathan would bring a case to him, you know, that somebody would bring a case to him. Nathan is quite shrewd, though. He doesn't say, let me tell you a parable. So, he relates this story as if it's actually happened.

[11 : 06] And he tells the story of a rich man that has many sheep and a poor man with one little lamb who he loves like a daughter. And the lamb sleeps in his arms. And a traveler comes into town and the rich man, by convention, is supposed to lay on a bit of a spread for the guy, a big feast.

But instead of killing one of his own sheep, he takes the poor man's. And it doesn't say how he does it. Perhaps when the man was in the fields, he took it from him. David is enraged by this because he thinks it's a true story.

This man must die, which is quite an overjudgment considering it was just theft. As the Lord lives, this man must die, is what he says in verse 5.

Now, in previous sermons, I think I've talked about what a chiasm is. Does that sound familiar, a chiasm? Okay. So, a chiasm, as a reminder, is like an ancient writing thing where...

Regent College, thank you very much. So, the way it works is that something at the start of the story will relate to something...

[12 : 13] It's quite similar to something right at the end of a story. And kind of something like second in will kind of relate to something second from the bottom. Something, the next sort of thing down will kind of relate to the third thing up. So, stories can be structured in such a way that they kind of go like this.

That they draw your eyes to this middle idea. If you're reading, thinking about it. If you're not thinking about it, it's just like blah, blah, blah. Something happens after something happens. But if you're reading with ancient Near Eastern eyes, you'll kind of note this thing, right?

And it points to something in the middle. And it's the thing in the middle that's quite important. It's very important. The narrator writes in such a way as to make this like what you're aiming at.

Now, it's around here that the writer wants to draw our eyes to. Drawing our eyes to, the Lord is displeased and you are this man.

So, David is enraged by what has happened. And Nathan says, you're that guy. You are this man. This is what the passage wants to let us know.

[13 : 21] This is what it wants us to remember. You are this man. You are this woman. And why is this so important? I mean, surely the grace and forgiveness coming up is more important.

Surely that should be the center. Team, this is part of God's grace. This is the grace of God here. God's saying to you, you are this man.

You are this woman. This is God's grace. Exposure is part of God's grace. It means that God is pursuing you.

It means that he does not want you to be comfortable in your sin. God comes after you. And there should be great comfort to you. Not that it is pleasant being flayed open like this.

But it is good. And we should be glad. Because it's actually God's judgment when he abandons us. When God lets us succeed at sinning, it is God's judgment on us.

[14 : 32] Scene 5. And that thing goes on to tell David just how crazy he was to take this another man's wife. And David responds with this very simple confession.

I've sinned against the Lord. In verse 13. And you might go, ah, it's a bit short for what he's done. But I think the briefness of it is a good sign.

There is no cloaking. There is no excuses. There is no searching for a loophole out of this. You know, well, I wasn't getting on with my wives.

You know, like, I was having a bad day. I was feeling insecure. There's none of that. There's no pretext. He just acknowledged his guilt openly without excuse.

I think it's a good sign. Nathan says, the Lord has put your sin away. You will not die. And again, you might think, geez, that is just, it's just too easy. It's too easy.

[15 : 34] And it would be too easy except for verse 14. Where Nathan says, well, there must be a cost. And your son is going to die. The son was David's substitute.

And as Christians, we know about this kind of cost, right? God being holy and just doesn't sweep our sin under the carpet. He can't pretend it didn't happen. There's always a price.

And this child bears the cost, which obviously foreshadows, you know, the great cost of Christ, you know, on the cross for us. And it is a reminder that grace, I mean, it is a cliché, but you know it, that grace is free, but it is very costly.

Scene six. Now, scene six is kind of odd. It's verses 15 to 23. In summary, the little boy gets sick, and it's not looking good. And David lays on the ground, and he fasts, and he prays on behalf of the boy.

Then the boy dies, and David gets on with his life. Does that strike you as, I wonder if that struck you as kind of a weird sort of scene in the whole thing. And we may look at that and go, goodness, David is really stupid.

[16 : 39] I mean, God has passed his judgment, you know, like, is he trying to manipulate God? Is he trying to trick God? No, I think this is, this is, David understands grace here.

David has been gripped by grace. He understands that God's grace is peculiar. For him, it was more than a doctrine.

He had a real sense of it. He had hope. Perhaps God will save this child. Because God is good. Perhaps God will save this child. And when the child dies, David realizes that that was God's choice, and gets on with his life, gets on with it, has dinner.

Scene seven, we'll skip and come back to, straight to scene eight. Joab calls David up and tells him to come to war to finish off the Ammonites, which he does, and then he enslaves them, which is a no-no for David.

I mean, the Hebrew people were slaves, right? It links back to the Egyptian. David's kind of linking himself slightly with the Egyptians here, I think. Now, you'll notice, here's the first part of the chiasm, okay?

[17 : 57] The story begins, it was a time of war with the Ammonites, right? It ends with going back to this war story again. Now, at the beginning of chapter 11, what does it say?

At the time when kings go off to war, what was David doing? He was sitting at a couch perving at women. That was what he was doing. And he should have been at war with his comrades, right?

He should have been leading them. That's his job. This is a clue, and a not-so-subtle clue, that given the enslavement, given his perving, sitting-on-couching kind of situation, given the fact that the guy under him had to tell him to go to war, that David is slipping.

Now, he's clearly forgiven, absolutely, but he's going downhill, which is why scene 7 is there. Scene 7 is verses 24 to 25. It says this, David comforted his wife.

They slept together. They had a son, Solomon. It says, curiously, the Lord loved him, verse 25. Isn't that amazing? This is, Solomon is a product of a very sordid chapter, and yet God loves him.

[19 : 09] And he is the man that has chosen to take over after David, we find out. You see, God, again, will push his kingdom forward with the man he chooses, not on their merit, but by his choice, by grace.

And this should be a great comfort for us. Okay, how do we summarize? I'm not going to go over the main points. I think you've got them. I'm going to accept to say this. I have harped on in the past about this.

David, at his best, points to Christ. Gives us a glimpse into the character of God. Now, David, at his worst, which he is here, David, at his worst, also points to Christ in our great need for a rescuer, a great need for a substitute.

This passage tells us more than we want to know about ourselves, I think. And so how do we respond to it? Because it would be easy just to get really depressed and stir in our own juices and just go, oh, I'm so terrible, end of story.

But our response to a really challenging word like this is to come to God. Come to God in prayer and humility.

[20 : 34] And if you do not know how to do that, if you're not quite sure what to do, I would direct you to the Psalms.

And they can give voice to the things in your heart, the things that you might not have words for. And I'll finish this by giving you an example. I will pray for you, on your behalf, with you.

Psalm 51. Just the first 12 verses. Psalm 51 was the Psalm that David wrote after Nathan the prophet went to him. And here we hear David's heart.

So let me pray this Psalm for you. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy.

Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.

[21 : 43] Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, you delight in truth, in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Amen. Amen.