Lessons from King David

After reading the first ten chapters of II Samuel, it would be safe to say that David, the former shepherd boy (II Samuel 7:8), had it all. He had been elevated to the throne of his people after the death of king Saul (II Samuel 2:4; II Samuel 5:3). He "waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." (II Samuel 3:1). His victories over the Philistines, (II Samuel 6), the Moabites (II Samuel 8) and others demonstrated that he had the Lord fighting for him.

Despite all of his blessings, David succumbed to temptation and committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most loyal soldiers, Uriah. II Samuel 11 describes this ungodly deed and the sins in which David participated thereafter. Read carefully through that chapter and you will see how David sought to cover up his sin. In fact, he became quite callous toward his actions. Having given orders for Uriah to be sent into the hottest part of a battle, David's attitude toward Uriah's death in the fight "displeased the Lord." (II Samuel 11:27). Said the king, "the sword devoureth one as well as another." (II Samuel 11:25). In other words, "Those are the fortunes of war. Some die. It's not serious."

As II Samuel 12 opens we find the prophet Nathan coming to Israel's king with a parable. It was the story of a rich man who had a visitor come to his house. Wanting to impress his friend, the rich man laid out a sumptuous feast, highlighted by a carefully prepared lamb as the main course. The trouble was that instead of taking the lamb from his own plenteous flock, the rich man stole a lamb from a poor Israelite who had only that one little ewe to his name. When David heard of this horrific deed, he angrily pronounced the judgment of death against the cruel and heartless rich man. "And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity," the king added (II Samuel 12:6).

Before considering some lessons from these events, let's go back and review what's been said thus far. Here was a man who was greatly blessed. He even acknowledged God as the source of his blessings (II Samuel 7:18-29). He put God out of his mind long enough to commit the sin of adultery. However long it was between the time of this act and the time that Bathsheba told him she was with child, it would seem that he was not repentant of his actions during that period. While Uriah was home, David concocted schemes designed to cover up his sin. When those didn't work, he devised a plan for eliminating Uriah. All during this, David kept looking for a way to gloss over what he had done. His heart was not pricked, his conscience was not hurting. His downward spiral into sin's clutches culminated in his response to Nathan's parable. It never occurred to him that he might have been the rich man and Uriah the poor man of Nathan's story. Someone else was at fault for a pitiless deed and they deserved to be punished. Now let's move on to the lessons.

Never have a few, simple words had such a profound impact on a soul when, having heard the king's response to his parable, Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man." (II Samuel 12:7). Through this bold prophet the Lord went on to catalog the many blessings that He had given the king, adding, "and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things." (II Samuel 12:8). Nevertheless, David had allowed temptation to uproot all of that from his heart and replace it with lust, adultery, deceit and murder. The pull of the world is strong. If we allow it to dominate our thoughts, those thoughts will rule our actions. It's doubtful that David set out that day to commit adultery. Had he run away as Joseph did (Genesis 39:7-12), perhaps that sin and the ensuing transgressions in which he had engaged would never have occurred. We cannot afford to let our guards down for a single moment.

How long might David have continued in his self-deception had it not been for the Lord sending Nathan his way? How long would it have been before he would have admitted to and taken responsibility for his sins? No one on earth knows, but this one thing is for sure: As difficult as it was for David to hear Nathan's message, it was that message that led him to repentance. Hearing a strong message from the Word of God can be unpleasant. In fact, some today refuse to hear such a message. Likely folks of this ilk would consider Nathan unloving and unkind. Perhaps they would have exhorted Nathan to direct his attention to more positive matters and not highlight the negatives. Still, it was God who was the true author of Nathan's parable. The prophet spoke what the Lord sent

him to say. It was what was needed to correct error and, as James would later write by inspiration, "to save a soul from death." (James 5:19-20).

Psalm 51 is generally considered to be a song written by David after receiving Nathan's message. There is a significant contrast between David's attitude in this Psalm and the attitude he displayed before he took Nathan's parable to heart. When earlier he had tried to hide his sins and train his thoughts on the evil deeds of others, Psalm 51 shows a heart that now accepted responsibility for the wicked works in which he had engaged. Notice the abundance of personal pronouns in regard to the sins that had been committed. "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightiest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." (Psalm 51:2-4).

These events in David's life remind us of the need to keep our hearts and minds focused on that which is right and true (Philippians 4:8), the power of plain preaching and the need to accept responsibility for our actions. What powerful lessons we learn from these incidents in the life of the individual whom God described as "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22).

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