

NATHAN'S DANGEROUS STORY

I sometimes wonder if the prophet Nathan is the bravest man in the Hebrew Bible?

He's certainly got a tough gig in today's reading.

Here is your mission:

Go to the king, the most powerful man in the land, and expose his dirty secret.

This is the task.

And how might King David respond?

He might just have Nathan killed.

After all, he's already had Uriah killed.

But Nathan tells his story – a clever little parable about a rich and powerful man who abuses his power.

We heard it earlier.

The rich man steals the one lamb of his poor neighbour to make food for an unexpected guest.

Nathan tells the tale and David totally falls for it.

"Who is this guy? This is an outrage!

This man must die!" he shouts.

Then comes the daring punch line.

No doubt with knees knocking together,

and mouth drying up,

Nathan summons his courage, raises his hand and points straight at the King.

"You are that man!" he exclaims.

Bathsheba – here's another woman from the Bible that we know next to nothing about. (The other week we were thinking about Mary Magdalene)

But maybe it's fitting in a way - at least in this case.

Because Bathsheba isn't given much individuality in the story.

It's not about her.

It's all about David and what he wants.

Now, given that David gets big billing as the man who walks with God,

he is the blue-eyed boy,

he is the hero,

he is the brave warrior,

he is the most respected king,

he is the praying musician responsible for some of the great psalms

and the King who urges the nation to acknowledge God as ultimate king,

who encourages all to worship God;

given that David is all this,

this incident is more than a little awkward.

Some have tried to support David a bit.

Chronicles (which was like an official court report of history) doesn't even record this story! It doesn't mention this embarrassing incident in the King's life. The official Jewish court records simply keep this whole story out of their account.

It's a bit like today when a government investigation concludes that the government hasn't done anything wrong. It's a cover up.

Joseph Heller (author of Catch 22) wrote in his book "God Knows" that Bathsheba tried to seduce David – so it's all **her** fault!

In the 1950's film, Gregory Peck's David and Susan Hayward's Bathsheba fall in love.

They couldn't help it then! Because it was love – and love is such a strong emotion.

Who can blame them really?

Never mind the fact that an innocent man was sent to his death.....

The 1980s King David film suggests that Uriah was violent and abusive towards his wife. By killing him David was doing a great service to humanity!

All of this is total whitewash and total tosh.

There is **no** evidence that Bathsheba tried to seduce David.

Ah, but what kind of woman takes a bath on a roof?

Some people have justified *that* by pointing out that ordinary people in those days couldn't bathe indoors, and there were usually containers of water stored on their roofs - which were, of course, flat.

But get this.

The Bible doesn't say that she was bathing on the roof.

It tells us only that David happened to see her from the walls of the palace.

Chances are that she was in her courtyard, which would have been enclosed.

That's how most people would get washed.

It was the height of his palace walls that enabled David to see into other people's property.

There is **no** evidence that Bathsheba tried to seduce David.

There is **no** evidence that David and Bathsheba were in love.

They didn't even know each other. David had to investigate just to find out her name!

Once David had taken what he wanted she is shipped off back home.

There is no suggestion of an ongoing relationship.

That only happens because she turns out to be pregnant!

There is **no** evidence at all that Uriah was a bad husband or that he was a bad person.

In fact, all the evidence points to him being good and a loyal subject.

And when Nathan's story gets to its conclusion, David doesn't try to latch on to any of these excuses either.

Because none of them are remotely true.

Instead, at last David decides to do the hard thing - which is also the right thing. He faces the truth about himself.

It was a big **thunk** moment for David.

A moment when he decided to stop pretending and stop using his power to steam roller over other people.

A moment when David is basically forced onto his knees.

A moment when David realises that God is speaking to him just as surely as Nathan is standing there in front of him.

You see, David must have known the courage it took for Nathan to speak up.

David must have known that he could (if he wanted) have Nathan taken away and killed and add another innocent victim to the whole sordid tale.

On the other hand, David must have known that to admit that Nathan was right and to confess to this sin would be something that would get out to the ears of the court and the wider world, and that his great reputation for being "*a man who walked closely with God*" was going to be in tatters.

But David knew most of all that somehow (even after all the terrible things he had done), he had to find a way back again.

He needed to try and confess,

to put things right,

to find forgiveness and restore his relationship with God once more.

What he had done was to create terrible relationships.

It wasn't just that his relationship with Bathsheba and husband Uriah was faulty, his relationship with God was now faulty as well.

Now David might have believed he was free from the condemnation of others.

His plan (bad as it was), had worked.

No one knew the truth.

He had got away with it.

Uriah was dead. Dead men tell no tales.

But was he happy?

Did he sleep easily at night after what he'd done?

Did he feel good about himself?

I think we know enough about David to guess what he was like.
 He was tortured inside over all that had happened.
 He was haunted by the unfolding of events.
 And the guilt that plagued him meant that he was no longer close to God.

I was talking to another minister recently who spoke of a report he had read on ministers in the USA who had fallen from grace, and I think in most cases lost their jobs.
 Someone decided to interview them to see if there were common reasons.

The presenting issues were totally different.
 These ministers may have run off with the organist's wife,
 or stolen money from the church,
 or turned up to lead worship in a total drunken stupor – the issues were as different as night from day.

But there was one thing that every one of those pastors admitted to.
 It was that they had let their relationship with God slip.
 Obviously as ministers they were going through the motions but they weren't close to God.
 The relationship wasn't right.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and suggest that no one here has stolen the one lamb belonging to someone else to make a meal for some guests.
 And I'm further going suggest that not one of us here has ever been a king that has stolen someone else's wife and then arranged for that person's death.

We haven't done **these** things.

But we've got our stuff.
 We all foul up.

And sometimes what we do (or what we **have** done) haunts us.
 Our crime might be against someone else or may just be against ourselves.
 But it lies heavily on us.
 And it affects not just our relationship with ourselves and our neighbours but it affects our relationship with God.

There is a barrier between us.
 And yet the good news is always that the barrier can be taken down.

And that happens when we have the courage to be honest and admit the truth.

Every addict knows that the recovery only begins when they have the courage to admit there is a problem and look for help and strength to move away from it.

Scholars believe that Psalm 51 was written by David just after his meeting with Nathan and his confession of guilt.

*“Be merciful to me, O God,
because of your constant love.
Because of your great mercy,
wipe away my sins!
You are right in judging me,
you are justified in condemning me.
Create a new heart in me, O God
and put a new and loyal spirit in me.
Do not banish me from your presence;
do not take your holy spirit away from me.
Give me again the joy that comes from your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.”*

Somehow, despite the horror of his past, David was able to find forgiveness – and a way to rebuild a relationship with God once more.

There would still be fall-out over what he had done, there would still be consequences to his actions – even within his own family. I guess there would still be those who would not recover their respect for him.

But David was able to move ahead into a new chapter of his life, knowing that somehow God had forgiven him and he was able to begin life again with a clean heart.

He didn’t deserve that forgiveness, he wasn’t owed it, but he received it when he confessed to God.

Despite the image that many have of God, and the stern picture of God sometimes painted by those in the Church, it is possible for us (like David) to move on from the things that block and mar our lives.

Forgiveness still exists.
It comes to us from God.
And it is still offered to us beyond our deserving.

2 Samuel 11:26-12:7a
Psalm 51:1-12

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