

“Man of Sin vs God of Grace.” 2 Samuel 11:1-15

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 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 the woman was very beautiful.

And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” So, David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, “I am pregnant.”

So David sent word to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” And Uriah went out of the king’s house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, “Uriah did not go down to his house,” David said to Uriah, “Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?” Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.” Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So, Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening, he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today we have for our meditations one of the most chilling stories in the Bible. The vivid account on how the king David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most faithful elite soldiers, Uriah, and how David murdered Uriah.

Isn’t this Bible a strange book? This is how it openly depicts one of the heroes of faith, one of God’s favourite saints, one of the main characters in the OT history. How do you feel when you hear this story? For David is one of us, one of God’s beloveds.

That's what his name means – beloved. So, why do we have this shameful page in the life of the otherwise faithful and righteous, courageous and devout king David recorded with all the embarrassing and even shocking details? What is the purpose of this?

Through this lively account the Holy Spirit brings to us, not only to our minds, but also to our very hearts, two of the most important teachings of the Bible. He teaches us about sin, and about God's unbelievable grace. Our sin and God's grace.

This is what I invite you to reflect on today, as we meditate on this event. Now, let's do a little test, let's examine ourselves, let's look into our hearts, into our souls and let's tell ourselves honestly – how do we measure up against the king David?

When you hear this story, what do you think? Are you better than him? Most likely you have never done anything like that. We may be even thinking that we would never ever do anything like that. For what he did was shocking. What do you think?

Hold on to your thoughts and let's reflect on what we know about king David. The books of Samuel reveal a great deal about this man. He came from an ordinary family, as the youngest son... bravely shepherding his family's flock.

But then, it was God Himself who chose him to be a king of Israel. And the reason why God chose David was quite remarkable. Because He knew David's heart. He knew what was hidden to the human eye, He knew the very inner being of David. He saw that David was a man after His own heart.

As we read the accounts of David's life, it is difficult to not begin to love the man. If not love then at least like and find him really attractive. Courageous, athletic, audacious, totally devout to his God and incredibly faithful to his king, adventurous, skilful leader in battle, caring for his soldiers, passionate in his friendships, just, fair, humble, generous, gracious... how can you not like the guy?!

Especially when we read about how many injustices he had to suffer, how unfairly he was treated, how often he was in danger, but in every situation, he trustingly looked upon his God and fully relied on him. Patiently... not my will, but yours...

Finally, God made David a king over the nation of Israel. So much was given to him, so blessed he was and then... then we get this account. When we read this account, we can feel our hearts almost seizing. What are you doing, David?!

This is where we can see the power of sin on display. And before you rush to express your condemnation on David, try just for a moment to imagine... that you are in that position. With all the power to do whatever you want. To get whatever you want.

There are loyal people around you and they will fulfill your every request, and they will remain loyal, and they will remain silent about what has happened. You can do almost

whatever you want, no one will object, no one will hinder your plans and no one will accuse you of anything. And you will have your good name in public.

How would you use such a situation?! Everything is permitted and almost no consequences... King David was walking on the roof of his palace, when he saw this beautiful woman. Naked, bathing... He saw her and his passions were kindled.

“Who is she? Go and find out!” **“Isn’t this Bathsheba, wife of your faithful warrior Uriah?”** Sure, she is. But Uriah is far away, fighting for his king. He is not here to protect his wife. She is alone. “Bring her to me! I want this woman.”

So, they brought Bathsheba to David and... the man after God’s own heart slept with her. **And she conceived and sent a message to David: “I am pregnant.”** Ouch! What now?! How to cover what had been done? How to hide this shameful crime?

David sends after Uriah under the disguise of wanting to know how things are on the battlefield. The plan is simple. Let’s bring Uriah home, he will use his opportunity to sleep with his wife, and – David is off the hook. Smart plan. Uriah arrives.

He brings the report, but then he also brings a nasty surprise to David. He doesn’t go to his wife. He doesn’t use the favourable circumstances. He is too noble, too faithful to his king and to his superiors and to his fellow soldiers.

“My lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.” What a blow to David?!

Uriah is not just ruining his plan. He demonstrated such complete and undivided loyalty to his king... who in his absence just slept with his wife... What an accusation to David! Uriah’s righteousness contrasts with David’s wickedness.

David gives another try. Let’s make Uriah drunk, let’s allow alcohol to guide his behaviour, that should solve the issue; get drunk, sleep with your wife and no one will ever find out about the dirt in David’s resume.

But Uriah, he is just unbearable! Even drunk, his virtues and loyalty doesn’t falter. What can you do with such a faithful servant?! The lawlessness of David needs to be covered, by all means, whatever the cost. Even if someone has to die.

In the morning David wrote a letter to [his general] Joab and asked Uriah to deliver his own death sentence. The letter said: **“Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.”**

Joab did as David requested, and Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba was killed in the battle. David took Bathsheba as his wife and she bore him a son. It may appear that David has gotten away, but **“the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.”** **“And**

the Lord sent [prophet] Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him.

Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan,

"As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight?"

This is what this account tells us: "You are the man! You are the woman! We have despised the word of the Lord; we have done what is evil in His sight!" There are many sins we have done that others don't know. But the Lord knows...

And they have displeased the Lord. The same sin that dwelt in the heart of king David, dwells in our hearts. We just don't have that much power and opportunities. But if the prophet Nathan would come today, he would say to us: "You! You are that person!"

We are the ones who have looked at others with lustful intent; we are the adulterers just like David. We are the ones who have been angry with and have insulted our loved ones; we are murderers just like David. We have lied and schemed and deceived trying to cover up what we are ashamed of, so that no one would know, so that we would look like good and moral people. It is us, me and you. For our God knows our hearts.

We can fool others, we can even fool ourselves, but we cannot fool our God. What we can do and what we should do is exactly what David did. Struck to the heart by words of Nathan, in heartfelt repentance David cried out: "I have sinned against the Lord."

Do you recognize this psalm? **"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! 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."** It is Psalm 51. Read it all!

We use it in our liturgy. David wrote this Psalm after prophet Nathan had spoken with Him, and we all now join David in praying this psalm. But as soon as David's heart was struck, recognizing what he had done, Nathan spoke again, the message that mattered the most.

“[David], the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.” The Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die, you are forgiven! This is the second lesson that we learn from this event. God’s incredible grace. Undeserved grace. Incomprehensible grace.

David didn’t get what He deserved. We don’t get what we deserve. Our God is not fair with us. We get His grace and forgiveness. But someone gets what we deserve. What every sin deserves; the wages of the adulterer and murderer and liar – death.

Someone, who is called the Son of David and the Son of God, Jesus from Nazareth, true God and true man, He steps down from His heavenly glory, He steps into our broken world, He steps into our place and He gets all that we deserve. He exchanges our sin to His righteousness, and we receive God’s pardon and favour.

As Paul wrote in his epistle to Ephesians, the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. We cannot comprehend it with our minds. Much more is needed, and much more is given. It is given to you to experience the grace of God far more abundantly than we may hope.

As Paul explains, writing to Ephesians, the Holy Spirit brings Christ to dwell in your hearts, so that you are rooted and grounded in His love, so that you may have the strength of God’s Spirit to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of God’s grace and so that you may be filled with all the fullness of our holy God.

What we cannot grasp with our minds, the Triune God allows us to experience – as He Himself embraces us, as He indwells in you and as His presence from time to time gives us a glimpse, a momentary feeling of what His grace and love are like.

Brothers and Sisters, we are not that different from King David. Actually, we are, we trust our Lord far less than he did, we want to please our Lord far less than he did, and usually we are not at all in hurry to repent of our sins, secret or open.

Still, just like our God embraced David, just like he forgave him as soon as David realised what he had done, the same grace is given to us. And it doesn’t matter what we have done, what your secret or open sins are, whatever great they may be.

As soon as the Holy Spirit helps you to realize that you have sinned against our God – in thoughts, words and actions – and as soon as you want to turn away from your sins and return to our God, we hear His welcoming and life-changing voice:

“I forgive you all your sins! You shall live!” This is the message of this account. Even the best among us have the same dreadful sin dwelling in them, and even the worst of us receive the same abundance of grace.

May we never forget it.

Amen.