

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. **27** When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, **1** and the Lord sent 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. **2** The rich man had very many flocks and herds; **3** but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. **4** Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." **5** Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; **6** he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." **7** Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; **8** I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. **9** Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. **10** Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. **11** Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. **12** For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." **13** David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Have you been enjoying the Olympics? I love the Olympics. I love the human-interest stories. I love the passion that drives people to commit so much of their lives to the pursuit of excellence. I love watching the family members in the stands shouting their support, and being as emotional as the athletes, because they too have sacrificed to get that person out there on the floor, or the field, or in the ring, or the pool. I just really love the relational part of the Olympics. Many of the human-interest stories I heard were about athletes helping each other and competitors wanting the best for others, as well as themselves. I often heard athletes, when asked about a competitor say, "I love competing with them, they make me better." Maybe that is what I really love about these Olympic stories, is the reminder that no one gets there on their own. All of them have had to be

held accountable for the sacrifices others were making on their behalf...accountable for their practices, their dedication, their performances. No one is an island.

In the story of David and Bathsheba we find the cautionary tale of what it looks like when one man decides he can be that island. David, power unchecked by accountability, victimized Bathsheba, tried to destroy the moral character of her husband, Uriah, to cover up his abuse, and when he could not and knew his wrong doing would be discovered when her pregnancy could no longer be hidden, he had Uriah killed. David, no doubt, thought he had it all under control, but then came the consequences.

We might notice Bathsheba, still has no voice...as a matter of fact, she even loses her name in today's text. She is Uriah's wife...the widow of a murder victim...and, we learn, she is devastated. The text uses a churchy word that may water down the emotional impact but if you look up "lamentation" in the dictionary it is defined as: the passionate expression of grief or sorrow; weeping. Bathsheba is heartbroken. Her husband is dead, and she has her abusers baby growing inside of her. What will become of them? When her prescribed time of mourning is finished, David takes her again...this time to be his wife. Again, Bathsheba has no agency to refuse. Her options are too few.

All of this, we are then told, displeases the Lord. Which should come as no surprise when we know God demands justice and so far, no one in this story has received any.

Last week we talked of the need for confession, but one isn't going to confess until they can recognize that they have done wrong, and king David is so caught up in getting by with what he has done, that he hasn't even stopped to consider how bad any of it really is. Justification is a powerful tool of self-deception.

So, God sends David a preacher. It is obvious that David won't see how far he has strayed from God's will unless someone can help him to see it, so God sends Nathan. What follows is a brilliant example of what preaching can be. Now, let's be clear, in this case, it is not a sermon for the pulpit. Nathan's sermon is for David alone, but the function of his sermon is still on point for sermons that occur during any given worship service. Sermons should enable us to hear the truth of God's word in ways that transform us.

I've had people say to me before, it must be frustrating to be a preacher and know you can't say certain things from the pulpit, that you are limited in many ways because you don't want to upset people. Well, I don't look at the task of preaching in that way. I believe, as long as the message to be proclaimed is a message that carries the weight of God's word, then my only task as a preacher is to proclaim it in a way it can be heard.

What I mean by that is, if Nathan had blasted into the palace and begun to shake the ten commandments in David's face, screaming about fornicators and adulterers, and spewing condemnation, David would have probably had his guards throw Nathan out.

Few people respond to that kind of accountability for their own actions – they love it when it is pointed toward the sins of others, but not so much when the finger turns in their direction.

A convicting word from God has to be heard before it can carry weight...before it can be impactful. So, Nathan decides he has to help David hear the truth and what better way to reach the heart of shepherd than to tell a story about a lamb. Remember, David wasn't always a mighty king. He was once the smallest and weakest of his brothers. He had worked for his family as a shepherd and had no doubt loved the lambs under his care. I can even imagine that each year, he had a particular favorite among the spring lambs; one that he always carried when the journey got too difficult, the first one he protected when danger came their way, the one he curled up with and slept next to each night in the green pastures. David is so caught up in Nathan's story that he has forgotten to wonder why Nathan is telling it. Perhaps he imagines that Nathan is telling him a story from the town, and so David becomes outraged at the injustice done to the little lamb and the man who loved it. It's easy to become outraged when you are only looking at something through your own lens and not that of the broader truth. David can easily feel the pain of losing something he holds precious, but he has not once thought of the pain others might endure in losing something they hold precious.

Once David becomes outraged at the simple facts of Nathan's story, Nathan is able to say, "You, David, are the rich man. You are the one who slaughtered the lamb." If we look at verse 9, we can see Nathan goes on to say that David has been given the power and authority of God's word, God's call, God's promises, God's blessing and provision...but David's action have proven he has not given any weight to God's word, and there will be devastating consequences for that...and finally, through Nathan's sermon...David is able to see the horrible thing he has done. It takes a lamb to get him there...but he is finally able to see it and confess, "I have sinned against the Lord."

It takes a lamb to get us to that place as well. Jesus, the innocent lamb slaughtered by injustice, who offers the grace of God's love so that we can be restored in our relationship with God and with one another through the forgiveness of sins. But we must be able to see the truth of our actions in light of God's word...we must feel the weight of God's expectations in order to see our sin and repent.

Almost everything we do in worship is centered on giving praise to God. The sermon is really the only thing directed at the people. That's because the task of preaching is to connect us to God's story, to help us see where our lives need transforming so we can be a part of that story in ways that align with God's word and Christ's love. In that way, preaching is also a relational task, it is an invitation to accountability and confession that reminds us we don't get to this table alone...we don't get to a place of redemption alone...we are not created to be islands. We are created to love and to be loved within the boundaries of God's word.

To worship with rejoicing, is to live in ways that give weight to God's Word in our lives. That means to live with a willingness to be held accountable to God by hearing the word and with sacrifice, self-awareness, confession, and commitment to the truth, let that Word transform us into the people God invites us to be.