

# OpenTheo

## August 25th: 2 Samuel 12 & Colossians 1:21–2:7

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Nathan confronts David. The hidden mystery proclaimed.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

2 Samuel 12 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. 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. Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul, and I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.

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. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of 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 sun, for you did it secretly.

But I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun. David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, The Lord also has put away your sin, you shall not die.

Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die. Then Nathan went to his house, and the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

And the elders of his house stood beside him to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died, and the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. But they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us.

How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm. But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, Is the child dead? They said, He is dead.

Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes, and he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. He then went to his own house, and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died you arose and ate food.

He said, While the child was still alive I fasted and wept, for I said, Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me that the child may live? But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me. Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went into her and lay with her.

And she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him and sent a

message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.

Now Joab fought against Rabba of the Ammonites and took the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David and said, I have fought against Rabba. Moreover I have taken the city of waters.

Now then gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called by my name. So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabba and fought against it and took it. And he took the crown of their king from his head.

The weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone, and it was placed on David's head. And he brought out the spoil of the city, a very great amount. And he brought out the people who were in it, and set them to labour with swords and iron picks and iron axes, and made them toil at the brick kilns.

And thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem. After chapter 11 ended by speaking of the Lord's displeasure at David's sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, in chapter 12 of 2 Samuel God sends his prophet Nathan to confront David concerning that sin.

Nathan is the latest of several messengers who have been going to and fro. David had used various messengers to help him to commit his sins. Now the Lord sends a messenger to challenge him in his sin.

One of the larger concerns in this section, as James Jordan observes, is that of the dynasty. In the earlier chapters of the book, the fate of Saul's dynasty as David rises to power is a prominent concern. Now the reader should be asking the question of the fate of David's dynasty.

The Lord has promised great things concerning it in chapter 7, but David has now compromised his house and his rule. As we saw in the previous chapter, David by his sin had tied himself to Joab, and Joab's violence would increasingly undermine David's kingdom. Rumours of David's sin had presumably spread among the servants.

All the messengers being sent to and fro were made complicit in the sin or certain parts of it, and they would be spreading the word around. They did not look at David in the same way again. There seemed to be divergences from the instructions given to servants in the preceding chapter as well.

As David would now be able to command less authority as a result of his reputation as a righteous and upstanding man, his capacity for rule would be weakened. His own treachery would lead to people in his administration rising up against him. The more that David became entangled personally with his sin, the more the people around him were made complicit in it, and the more the people who were around him were either

corrupted by David's sin or elevated on account of their corruption.

Of course, all of this contrasts with the faithful servant Uriah, who was killed by David. He is killed precisely on account of his loyalty, the fact that he will identify with the men in the field rather than going to sleep with his wife and enjoy the pleasures of home. Then his faithfulness as a message bearer is exploited as David makes him carry his own death warrant to Joab.

Sin by its very nature cannot easily be compartmentalised. We may think that we can play with sin for a while, all the time keeping it in a safe corner of our lives, but we will soon find that it starts to infect everything else. The question then of how David's rule can be restored and who will inherit the kingdom after his death will become much more prominent issues in the chapters that follow.

David's sons will start to assume a much greater place in the narrative. To be restored from the high-handed, intentional sins that he committed concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, David would have to repent. As David acknowledges in Psalm 51, which he composed after being confronted by Nathan, in verses 16 and 17, Nathan, when he confronts David, confronts him with a story, some regarded as a sort of parable.

It is offered to David as a case that, as the ruler, he must judge. The story is fundamentally one of cruel oppression, with theft as a part of it. The rich man possesses large flocks and herds, but the poor man possesses just one new lamb, to which he is deeply attached.

The lamb is his only possession, and he loves it as if it were a member of his own family. He treats it not as mere livestock, but as if it were his own daughter. Within the parable then, the sin of the rich man is most especially felt in his oppression of the poor man.

It is not just the act of stealing, but it is from whom he is stealing that is especially highlighted. The parable particularly focuses upon David's adultery. He takes the daughter-like sheep from the bosom of the poor man.

We should remember that this is being directed to David, who is the shepherd of Israel. He has a great many flocks and herds of people that he guards and looks after. However, Uriah was as it were the shepherd of just one person, his wife Bathsheba.

David, as the shepherd-guardian of the whole nation, steals for the sake of his own pleasure from a poor shepherd, Uriah, the man with just one new lamb. David, when he hears the case, is infuriated, and declares judgment upon it. The man must die because of his oppression, and the lamb must be restored fourfold, according to the law of Exodus chapter 22 verse 1. As a leader, David was subject to a higher judgment.

The Lord had shown great mercy and grace to David. He had given the kingdom of Saul into David's hands. He had given Saul's house and even his wives into David's hand.

The reference to Saul's wives being given into David's arms does not mean that David slept with them, but it means that he was made the guardian of the harem of the kingdom. David had struck down Uriah with the sword, indeed with the sword of the enemies of the Lord, the Ammonites, and now as a result of his sin the sword would not depart from his house. He had declared that the man who took the sheep of the poor man would have to pay back fourfold.

He would pay back fourfold from his own family. Evil would rise up for David from his own household, and as he took the wife of another secretly, his own wives and concubines would be taken openly and someone would sleep with them in the presence of all Israel. David had utterly scorned the Lord in his sin.

He had caused surrounding nations to blaspheme. If rumours concerning the sin of David were going round the palace, they had likely reached the ears of his enemies also. When people see the people of the Lord behaving in exactly the same way or worse than those around them, they can despise the Lord, thinking him little more than the false gods.

Perhaps the service of the Lord is just a mask used by hypocrites to cover up their sin and to make themselves seem better than others. The Lord has placed his name upon his people, yet when his people sin brazenly, much like their neighbours, his name is blasphemed. This is a classic example of what it means to bear the name of the Lord in vain.

In such situations the punishment of the unrighteous people of God is part of the means by which the Lord will vindicate his great name. In the parable David is judged as a shepherd, not just as a private individual. In chapter 7 the Lord had said that when the Davidic king sinned, he would be judged with the rod of men.

The king's personal sins could lead to consequences for the nation. And part of the tragedy is that the sin of David primarily leads to consequences for his house. Four of his sons will suffer premature deaths, a number of them as a result of violence.

His own wives and concubines will be taken and raped by one of his sons. The consequences of the sins of such a wicked shepherd will not merely fall upon himself, but upon all the people that he is associated with and looks after. The judgment upon David first falls upon his young son.

David pleads before the Lord for the life of his child. For a number of days he fasts before the child dies. All the time that the child is approaching death, David is mourning on account of the child, praying in God's mercy that he would spare the child.

But the child's life is taken. David, when he hears the news, arises from the earth, washes and anoints himself and changes his clothes. It's a resurrection.

The death due to him, as it were, has been born by his son, and now he can be restored.

Following the death of that son, another child is born to David of Bathsheba. The child is called Solomon, maybe a name suggesting the peace with God that David now enjoys.

The birth of Solomon is a sort of resurrection for David. The Lord loves Solomon and gives him the name Jedidiah, Beloved of the Lord. His name might remind us of David's name, which also means Beloved.

As Peter Lightheart observes, both Solomon and Absalom have Peace as part of their name. However, only Solomon lives up to that name. Solomon also receives a name from the Lord and is called Beloved. He is born as a sign of David's restoration and resurrection.

All of these things suggest that he is the rightful heir of the throne. Following the birth of Solomon, Joab sends news to David that the Ammonite city of Rabbah has been taken and that Joab has been fighting against Rabbah. So David goes up against Rabbah and captures it.

He receives the crown from the king of Rabbah and places it upon his head. He also receives very great spoil and reduces the Ammonites to servitude. David going up from Jerusalem to fight at Rabbah returns us to the very beginning of the story.

As Peter Lightheart has observed, there is a there and back again pattern to the story. It begins with Joab besieging Rabbah but David staying behind in Jerusalem. Then David sleeps with Bathsheba and she becomes pregnant.

David arranges for Uriah's death. Bathsheba mourns for Uriah. And then in the middle, Nathan confronts David's sin.

And then it goes back. David mourns for his infant son much as Bathsheba had mourned for Uriah. David's son dies much as he had arranged for Uriah's death.

David sleeps with Bathsheba again and she becomes pregnant again. And then at the end, David goes to Rabbah and finishes the siege and returns to Jerusalem. However this return movement is a restoration of David.

David receives a crown. He receives a great victory and he is established once again with an heir to his throne. An heir who will be blessed by the Lord.

However, even though David is restored before God, the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba have only started to play out. In the chapters that follow we will see the bitter fruit that the sins of David bore in the lives and actions of his children. A question to consider.

Looking at Psalm 51, written after David was confronted by Nathan concerning his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, what more can we learn about the character of David's

restoration? Why was David restored while Saul was not? Colossians chapter 1 verse 21 to chapter 2 verse 7. And you who were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, he is now reconciled in the body of his flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments, for though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Therefore as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Following on from the great hymn concerning Christ in verses 15-20, the end of Colossians chapter 1 moves on to unpack dimensions of its significance.

Paul has praised the majesty of Christ, both in the original creation order and in the new creation. The one by whom all things were created is the one by whom all things are reconciled to himself by the blood of his cross. The Colossians are part of this reconciliation.

Paul contrasts their former state as pagans to that which they were brought into by God's grace. Formerly they were alienated, hostile to God in their very thinking and evil in their actions. Mindset and action together were at odds with God and his holiness and truth.

However, now they have been reconciled by the body of Christ's flesh in his death, so that they can now be presented before him as holy, blameless and above reproach. The means of their reconciliation was Christ's body of flesh by his death. Christ, the one in

whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, assumed our flesh and not just flesh in general.

Christ came as a representative man, a new Adam and the Messiah and he bears in his body on the cross the full penalty of his people's sins. As we are brought into his body, sin has been decisively dealt with and we can be restored and transformed into his image, being remade in the one who is the image of the invisible God. The purpose of our redemption is that we might be presented holy and blameless.

Our setting apart by God in holiness is not merely an afterthought of our deliverance from the punishment of our sins, it is the point of it all. As God's redeemed people we are to be without blemish and without reproach, purified from the stain of sin and justified from its guilt. All of this requires that we continue in the faith.

The work of the Spirit by which we endure in faith to the end is a necessary aspect of our salvation. It is by the work of the Spirit that we are brought from God's declaration that we are in good standing before him on account of Christ's work to the reaffirmation of that declaration on the last day when, in a judgement of our entire lives and works, God declares us to be in good standing with him. Paul speaks of the worldwide proclamation of the gospel to every creature or in all creation under heaven.

Paul is probably speaking in an anticipatory sense here of the way that the gospel, the good news that the kingdom of God is established in the lordship of Jesus the Messiah, has been sent forth into the entire world through the ministry of Paul and other messengers like him. The message hasn't yet reached everyone but it has been sent out. In the verses that follow Paul presents the Colossians, who have yet to meet him, with a portrait of himself as a minister of the gospel.

In the most surprising statement in this section he claims that not only is he suffering for their sake but that he is filling up in his flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church. Paul believes that Christians must enter into and participate in Christ's sufferings as part of the passage into the new age of the resurrection. Christ doesn't just suffer for his church but also as an example for and representative of his church and bride and his bride must join with him in his suffering.

Paul's sufferings are not the redemptive sufferings of Christ but the tribulation that Christ experienced and which he foretold would come upon his people. As we share the fellowship of Christ's sufferings we join with him in tribulation. These tribulations are the birth pangs of the new creation.

Christ has entered into this new creation ahead of us through the birth pangs of the cross and the rebirth of the resurrection. We follow in his footsteps. Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles wishes to shelter those to whom he is ministering from the worst of the tribulation that is coming upon the church by taking as much as he can upon himself.



Recognising that his sufferings aren't meaningless but indeed are part of the process by which a new creation is coming to birth, Paul can rejoice in them knowing that they aren't futile or in vain. The work of the proclamation of the gospel still needs to be completed and it is through the suffering and the labours of people like Paul that this work is taking place. Paul was made a servant of the church with a very special and particular mission.

He was given stewardship of a great mystery of divine revelation that now in the fullness of time must be announced. Paul isn't just one of many missionaries, he is someone with a special and unique calling in redemptive history. The key import of the mystery is the salvation that is being made known in Christ, a salvation given to Gentiles as well as to Jews, as Christ dwells in his people assuring them of the fullness of salvation yet to be realised.

Christ has reconciled God and man by the cross and now the news is being sent out to all. Christ is what Paul is all about. The entire intent of his mission is to bring people into the Messiah and to bring them up to maturity in him so that on the last day they might be presented holy, blameless and without reproach before him.

Paul works towards this end, labouring with a God-given drive and energy that is powerfully at work within him. Paul is warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, not a hidden wisdom for a few privileged enlightened persons but a wisdom that is directed to and designed for everyone. Even though Paul has yet to meet them, Paul wants the Colossians to know that he has been struggling for them and for the church at Laodicea and other people that he has yet to meet.

How is he doing this? Well presumably first of all through prayer, he prays constantly for the churches, this is an introductory theme in almost all of his letters. He is also building up the church in the wider regions, he is training, he is equipping and sending missionaries and teachers to these various churches even if he is not visiting himself and he is writing letters to be circulated around them. Paul is working to establish a larger church movement, a church movement that will strengthen every single individual church within it.

As the apostle to the Gentiles he feels an especial responsibility to seek the up-building of all the different churches within these networks. His desire is that they will be encouraged and united so that they will achieve the full conviction of the knowledge of the mystery of God which is Christ himself. Everything is contained in Christ, all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, he is the key to the whole thing.

Paul however is concerned that they are not misled, that they never lose sight of all that they possess in Christ, no matter what clever arguments people might put forward. He may not be there with them in body but he is with them in every other way that matters, he is very concerned for their growth, constantly praying for them, seeking to do what he

can to build them up, even from prison, and he is encouraged by the progress that they are making. In the last chapter or so he is presented the most dazzling portrait of Christ.

He is the one over all creation, he is the one through whom the new creation comes, he is the mystery hidden before all ages and the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. They have received this Jesus and they must walk in this Jesus. It is in him that they must put down their roots, it is from him that they must draw all of their sustenance and find their strength and their security.

A question to consider, the term Christ-centred is often overused as a sort of positive brand name to be attached to all sorts of different things. How might Paul's teaching to this point of Colossians help us to give a fuller and more substantial account of what being centred on Christ actually means?