



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

Old Testament Parables
The Ewe Lamb

Second Samuel 12:1-13

Jesus is not the only person in the Bible to tell a parable. Actually, when Jesus taught in parables, he used a time honored teaching tool. The fact of the matter is that the Old Testament is filled with parables. Last week we read the parable spoken by the King of Israel to the King of Judah. It was the parable of the Thistle and the Cedar which warns us against problems caused by too much pride. Today we will hear one of the best known Old Testament parables. It will be spoken by the prophet Nathan to King David.

Before I read the parable, we need a little context:

One of the wonders of this computer age is the capacity a photographer has to fix a photograph. Today someone can take my picture, then using the computer they can remove the wrinkles, the scars, the spots and pimples, and with certain adjustments they can give a tan to my pale features, and make my hair look blonder that it already is. A good photographer using a computer can make me look pretty good.

One thing about the writers of the Old Testament is when they produce a verbal picture; they did not use a computer to remove the wrinkles and the scars. This is certainly true of King David. The greatest king in the history of Israel is portrayed as both hero and villain.

David was the heroic youth who chastised Israel's army for not trusting God in battle. There he was with his sling and five smooth stones facing the giant Goliath. David knew how ridiculous he looked to the giant and for that matter the entire Philistine Army. David had no chance against this war hardened soldier who stood a foot taller and broader than any man on the battlefield. Yet, with trust

in the one who is mightier than any army, David faced Goliath with confidence that God would win the battle.

David was the shepherd boy who spent those long hours watching over his sheep while writing songs about the wonder of God. **“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”** We who desire to live for the glory of Jesus Christ are challenged by David, whom scripture says had a heart for God. “O God, give us such a heart.”

David loved God, his heart was for God, he trusted in God, he was anointed as a youth, as a simple shepherd boy, to one day become the King of Israel. David was given the promise that his descendants would always sit upon the throne of God’s people, and in Jesus Christ the prophecy was fulfilled. Yet in David’s portrait you can see the scars. His sins are reported, and his crime is as horrible as anyone has ever committed.

The story of David’s sin begins when David sent his armies against the Ammonites, yet David stayed home. Rather than lead his men into battle, which was his usual custom, he gave the duty to his field general Joab. Maybe David should have been with his men on the battle front, but instead he stayed home where, standing on the rooftop of his palace, he saw Bathsheba bathing.

There he was, hiding, yet watching this beautiful woman, and his passion was aroused. He cannot get this woman off his mind, and his fantasizing was not enough. David sent for her, and she came. I’m sure there was dinner, one to which David’s wife was not invited. At dinner there was wine, and conversation that wisdom would tell the king to avoid, and of course the evening ended with the sharing of a bed. The word for it is adultery. Sometimes the only consequence is guilt, sometimes shame, but in this case the consequences included a less than Immaculate Conception.

What was David to do? As is always the case, one sin leads to another. David plotted to cover up the shame of having an affair with the wife of a soldier who was serving David on the battlefield. His cover-up began by ordering a furlough for Bathsheba’s husband.

David had to get Uriah home and into his wife's bedroom so the child would be thought to be properly conceived, for can you imagine what the papers would say if a national leader was having relations with the wife of a soldier serving on the front lines in Syria or Iraq?

Uriah had no clue why he was summoned by the King. He thought maybe, he would be asked to give the king a report on the battle.

David asked, "How are the men?"

"Your Majesty, they are doing quite well."

"How is the battle going?"

"We are giving the Ammonites a licking, Your Majesty."

"Do you think it will be long before the army can return home?"

"I am confident this war will be over soon, sir."

Uriah was fooled; he thought he was called to give a report to the king, when he was actually called home to have relations with his wife so the world would think that Bathsheba's child was Uriah's also child.

Following the report, David told Uriah to go home, but it was not in Uriah's constitution to take pleasure for himself when he knew he should be with comrades in arms. He slept on the porch at the palace; he would not go home and cover up David's indiscretion. A second meeting between Uriah and David took place. This time David got Uriah drunk, thinking this would make him go home, but once again Uriah slept on the porch at the palace.

Unable to cover his shame, David sent Uriah back to the war with a sealed message for Joab's eyes only. Little did Uriah know that the message he was carrying to Joab was his death warrant. Uriah was killed in the siege of Rabbah. At a signal, all David's men were withdrawn from the siege except Uriah, who was not given the signal. There he stood by himself, overrun by the enemy, fighting to the last for King David, and never understanding how he was betrayed as the sword cut through his heart.

Adultery, cover up, and murder are added to King David's resume. Oh, yes, the Bible does not give cover for sin, even at the expense of one about whom it is said, **"He had a heart for God."** I guess it is obvious that though David had a heart for God, it did not always beat for God, and I wonder about our hearts. Let that soak in for a minute, as we remember the parable Nathan spoke to David. Hear the word as I read from Second Samuel 12:1-13:

"The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a child to him.

"Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no compassion."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! ... Now the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. ... Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Anyone can pronounce judgment on sin, but it takes great skill to force someone to judge themselves. Thus was Nathan's purpose when he approached David. And with the guilty verdict came the judgment, **"Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house."**

O David, why didn't you lead your men into battle? Now the glory and splendor of your reign is over, and the eclipse of the night has come, and there are consequences to pay. If only you had been at the battle and not hidden on your roof to watch Bathsheba, you would have never written the letter that murdered Uriah. You would have never seen incest among your own children, Tamar dishonored and Amnon murdered. The bloody dagger of Absalom would have never passed like a curse before your eyes. And in the end you would have never cried out in absolute anguish, **“O Absalom, my son, I would have died in your place, O Absalom my son, my son!”**

The theologian may tell us that all the pain caused by David's sin was in fact the judgment of God, and of course it was, but as in most cases this judgment is to simply allow people to suffer the consequences of their own evil actions.

Maybe the saddest statement found this whole mess is found at the end of Second Samuel 11: **“When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.”**

In vain are all our honors and achievements and pleasures if at the end there must be attached to our epitaph this grim addendum, **“But he (or she) displeased the Lord.”**

“Here lies David the shepherd boy who faced Goliath and won the battle. Here is David, mighty warrior and greatest king of Israel . . . **But he displeased the Lord.**”

David had it all, palaces and armies and wives and servants; and what little this brave soldier Uriah had, David took. King David took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man.

Earlier this morning our reading from Luke gives what is perhaps the most terrible description of judgment in the Bible. The rich man is in hell because he took no notice of the poor man at his gate. Hell is the judgement of the rich man who sat in luxury while the poor man, covered with flies, longed to eat from the rich man's trash.

This sermon is about compassion. But, David had no compassion for Uriah, or the rich man for the poor man, and thus both are judged.

As Clarence McCartney wrote, “*Compassion* is not idle sentimentalism. Compassion is the surest path to love, and where love is there can be no injustice and no cruelty and no judgment.”

If David’s heart was not so hardened by his desires, and if he had compassion for Uriah and considered that he was in fact taking from this brave soldier all he had, surely he would have controlled himself and been saved from the dark night that swept over the rest of his reign as the King of Israel. If the rich man would have taken his eyes off his own luxuries and his greed and taken pity on the poor man, there would have been a glad reunion in heaven.

Can you imagine a world where people could place the focus of their attention upon others, where we have compassion for those who are less fortunate, and we seek what is best for others before our own personal wants? But we are prone to take a text from the Bible here and a text there and build a case that can justify our lack of compassion for others.

I heard minister say years ago when the United States, in an act of retaliation against Libya in which one of the children of Gadhafi was killed, was in a church group where someone said, “Well, we didn’t kill old Gadhafi, but at least we got one his kids.”

The minister responded, “Well, whatever you may think of the strike and the good that it will do, I don’t see how anyone can rejoice over the death of a child. He was just a child.”

The man said, “Well, the Bible says, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ It’s in the book.” Do you think it is possible to take a verse here and one there to justify a lack of compassion?

Compassion is a good word and one we need to understand and realize in our lives. Once again, if only David had compassion for Uriah, and the rich man for the poor man. Compassion is a godly attribute, and this is where a sour sermon proclaims the good news. For we read in the 103rd Psalm, “**As a father has**

compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.”

I am overwhelmed by the grace and the power of God. In the account of David’s atrocities, we all know that Uriah got the short end of the stick. We question how God would allow such an injustice to take place? Why do young men die on the battlefield doing something as noble as fighting for their country? I have no answer, for in God’s wisdom people are allowed to suffer due to the greed, lust, and selfishness of others. But I am overwhelmed by the knowledge of God that assures me that the injustices of this world do not have the final word, but Uriah, at the time of his death and even now, is not outside of God’s presence.

“As a father has compassion on his children, so, (and I would add) ‘a heartbroken’ LORD has compassion on those who fear him.”

In our service this morning we read two Psalms that are attributed to King David. Our Prayer of Confession is based on Psalm 51, written by a repentant, sorrowful and crushed King David. **“Have mercy on me, O God . . . blot out my transgressions** (I cannot do anything about them, but in your mercy blot them out) **. . . I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.”** Then his bold prayer, **“Create in me a clean heart . . . and do not take your Holy Spirit away from me,”** for without your Spirit I am no more than an animal.

If we held anyone to a standard of perfection we would all fall, and you who are the best of Christians, one reason you are so good is because you know this to be the case. Isaiah said it best, **“Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.”**

Our responsive reading this morning, Psalm 32, was also written by David, probably years after these atrocious events. The Psalm begins, **“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”** You talk about amazing grace! And so, my brothers and sisters, fellow sinners, forgiven and redeemed, as we approach our Lord’s Table, hear the words of David, **“Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all who are upright in heart.”**
Amen.