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The Adulterer

Four Scandalous Women Who Changed the World

2 Samuel 11-12

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In many Christian circles today grace has lost its power. It's a term we throw around in Christian circles; it's kind of a cliché. It's become safe; it's comfortable; it's predictable; it's anemic and has little power to change a life. But, when you read through the Scriptures, grace isn't like that at all. Grace isn't safe; it's not soft; it's not comfortable. It's kind of raw; it's edgy; it's very unpredictable and sometimes seems to go contrary to everything we believe is decent and right, to the point where sometimes it just seems downright offensive. There's probably no story in the Bible that better illustrates that than our story today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 11. This is the final story in our series—2 Samuel, Chapter 11. What's preceded chapter 11 is the story of David on a roll. David is King of Israel and God has blessed him with one victory after another. It would be fair to say the nation of Israel had never experienced this degree of safety and prosperity—perhaps the greatest moments in the history of the Hebrew people—but because of the events of chapter 11, that would never be true again. We pick it up in verse one:

> **Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.** (*NASB, 2 Samuel 11:1)

Now what are the signs of spring—the trees budding, the flowers blooming, the kings going off to war? At least that's the way it was in the Ancient Near East. Winter was the rainy season. They couldn't move but, as soon as things dried up, the kings would go out to fight. You can get the content of that opening paragraph with three verbs: David **sent**; they **destroyed**; David **stayed**. Basically David sends the army out to battle and this isn't a small force. It says...***all Israel***...this is the full army. But at a time when David should have been out leading his troops, as kings should do, David stays in Jerusalem. I would suggest to you the times in our life when we make the most reckless decisions are not times of adversity; they are times of prosperity. That's exactly what's happening here. Robert Alter, one of the experts of Hebrew narrative says, "This is a sedentary king with a dangerous amount of leisure time." Verse two:

> **Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance.**

You can't miss that the narrator describes David in the evening, just getting out of bed. That's an important detail. In the Ancient Near East siesta time would have been right after lunch in the spring of the year. So you take a little nap and then you get back to life. Here it is evening and David is just crawling out of bed after spending the entire afternoon taking a nap. So you have the army out at war, fighting and shedding their blood for the sake of the kingdom, while the king spends his day napping. Now he's up in the evening and he sees a very beautiful woman and we kind of get a feeling where this story is going.

> **So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"** (Vs. 3)

Now it's very unusual in a Hebrew text to have a woman identified both by her father and by her husband—kind of this double identification. The reason was probably because we know from other texts that both Eliam, her father, and Uriah, her husband, were warriors. They were among the elite forces. At the end of 2 Samuel we're told Uriah was among *the best of the best*. This guy was a warrior who was willing to lay it down for the sake of the kingdom. So you have basically two of David's most trusted, favored, elite soldiers connected in this story. One is Bathsheba's father; one is Bathsheba's husband. Now throughout this story Uriah is referred to as *Uriah the Hittite.* Of course *Hittite* would have been a non-Jew—a non-Hebrew—but his first name, *Uriah,* is a Hebrew name. So it's believed the family had been part of the Hebrew people for some time. His name actually means *The Lord is my Light.* So you have this scene where David sees this beautiful woman but this woman belongs to two of his most trusted, elite soldiers and we find ourselves thinking, "Surely he wouldn't." Verse 4:

> **David sent messengers and took her…** (Vs. 4a)

That word **took**…**took her**…there is really important. You go back to 1 Samuel where the nation of Israel cried out and said, "We want a human king!" They, in essence, rejected God as their King and said, "We'd like a human king like all the other nations." One of the things that God said to them through Samuel the prophet was, "If we do this—if you get a human king—know this; that king will take what he wants and he will take your sons and he will take your daughters." Now, here, is the fulfillment of exactly what was prophesized. **David took her…**

> **…and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."** (Vs. 4b-5)

Now that paragraph doesn't have many adjectives; it's driven by verbs. It's meant to keep the pace going quickly. So it sets up this scene where David—1, 2, 3—has an adulterous affair; it's over; she goes home. It's meant to create this picture that it was that fast and yet a moment of pleasure would cause a lifetime of regrets. From that moment on, neither David nor his family nor the kingdom will ever be the same again. David takes her; he sleeps with her. The idea of her bathing carries the idea that she was right at the tail end of her menstrual cycle. That's why she would have been bathing on the roof in the first place. It tells us a couple of things, most importantly, that she would have been just finishing her cycle which guarantees she was not pregnant, which then guarantees that this was indeed David's child. The only words that Bathsheba speaks in the entire story are two Hebrew words, three English words, "I am pregnant." Now David has a problem.

> **Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and a present from the king was sent out after him. 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. Now when they told David, saying, "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 are staying in temporary shelters, 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? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing."** (Vs. 6-11)

So David comes up with a plan. He brings Uriah home, chats with him about the war, says, "You know, why don't you just go home and relax, spend a little time with your wife." He sends a gift—most believe it was food and wine—"Have a lovely romantic evening." Of course he's hoping that Uriah will sleep with his wife and then think that this is his child. But Uriah doesn't go home. He sleeps outside the king's gate with the servants and the word comes back to David that Uriah didn't go home. So David says, "What's your problem? I brought you home; I let you spend a couple nights with your wife; how come you didn't go home?" And Uriah reveals his unbelievable loyalty and integrity with the king. He says, "How could I possibly go home and have a party and sleep with my wife when my fellow soldiers are out on the battle fighting a war?" Now you have to put that statement up against the fact that David was spending his afternoons napping while these soldiers were fighting. So you have this *integrity* of a soldier in the face of David, the *adulterer*.

> **Then David said to Uriah, "Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will let you go." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. Now David called him, and he ate and drank before him, and he made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his bed with his lord's servants, but he did not go down to his house.** (Vs. 12-13)

David tries one more time: "This time we'll pull him in; we'll have a little party; we'll get him drunk; surely he'll go home and sleep with his wife." But he doesn't. He still sleeps with the servants outside the king's gate. One commentator comments that, "A drunk Hittite has more integrity than the Hebrew king." That's quite a statement.

> **Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." So it was as Joab kept watch on the city, that he put Uriah at the place where he knew there were valiant men. The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David's servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died. Then Joab sent and reported to David all the events of the war. He charged the messenger, saying, "When you have finished telling all the events of the war to the king, and if it happens that the king's wrath rises and he says to you, 'Why did you go so near to the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?'—then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.' "** (vs. 14-21)

David so trusts Uriah that he actually puts Uriah's death notice in his hands to be delivered to Joab. Uriah delivers the note; Joab reads it. He knows in order for this not to look like some sort of a set-up, that other soldiers must die as well. So he puts them in a place where there's fierce fighting and not only Uriah, but several other faithful soldiers die. He brings a messenger in and says, "You need to go tell David this is what happened." But David does have a bit of a habit of attacking messengers that bring news he doesn't want to hear, so Joab's a little concerned about that. So he says, "If David seems to be getting a little upset that this battle plan was maybe not the best plan, you just tell him, 'Uriah is dead,' and that will quiet him down." Verse 22:

> **So the messenger departed and came and reported to David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, "The men prevailed against us and came out against us in the field, but we pressed them as far as the entrance of the gate. Moreover, the archers shot at your servants from the wall; so some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead." Then David said**

to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab, 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another; make your battle against the city stronger and overthrow it'; and so encourage him." (Vs. 22-25)

So the message comes back that soldiers have died in this battle, but among them is Uriah the Hittite. David's response is remarkably cold. Without an ounce of compassion he says, "You go back and tell Joab, 'Hey, don't worry about it; that's the way it goes. You live by the sword, you die by the sword; sometimes it happens. Just go back and attack the city; win the battle—no problem.' " Verse 26:

Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead...*[Now, make sure you don't miss the wording in verse 26; the redundancy is meant to drive this thing home.]* ***...the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead,*** **she mourned for her husband.** *[In case you didn't get it, Bathsheba was married to Uriah.]* **When the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife; then she bore him a son. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.**

David's big cover-up is completed. David had an adulterous affair with the wife of one of his most faithful and loyal soldiers. In order to cover it up he not only killed Uriah, but several other soldiers had to die. He's now guilty of adultery; he's guilty of mass murder; he thinks he's covered it all up. At the end of chapter 11 we are outraged. We agree completely with the words of the narrator, the thing which David did **...was evil in the sight of the Lord!**

Imagine you are Eliam. You are a faithful, elite soldier who, time and time and time again, have put your life at risk for this king, willing to die for him and, while you're out on the battlefield, laying it down, he's taking long naps and sleeping with your daughter and destroying her family. Imagine if you're Uriah's brother—if you've somehow connected this, put yourself in the story. Just imagine you're a teenage son and this is your father and mother. What has this king just done? This king had multiple wives; this king had everything he could ever want. But he's taken what was not his and he has absolutely destroyed your family. He has killed your father and he has taken your mother to be his own. You have to crawl inside this story to understand the level of outrage and our hearts resonate with those words, **"This was evil in the sight of the Lord**.*"*

Chapter 12:

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said,
"There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor.
The rich man had a great many flocks and herds.
But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb
Which he bought and nourished;
And it grew up together with him and his children.
It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom,
And was like a daughter to him.
Now a traveler came to the rich man,
And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd,
To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him;
Rather he took...*[Don't miss that word.]* **...he took the poor man's ewe lamb and Prepared it for the man who had come to him."**
Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the

LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." (Vs. 1-6)

You can't miss that this parable is set up very similarly. It's almost as if it's through the eyes of Eliam, the father. But you have this poor man who has one little ewe lamb. To him it was like his daughter and he cherished it and he treasured it; it was part of the family. The rich man had a whole herd of animals but, when somebody came to visit, rather than taking one of his own, the rich man took the one lamb from the poor shepherd and killed it. And David is absolutely outraged. David himself had been a shepherd; he would clearly identify with this and he says, "That man must die!" That's his initial response—he must at least make restitution four times over. About the time he's feeling the outrage...verse 7:

Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!...[About the time David is reaching the peak of his outrage, Nathan sticks his boney finger in David's nose and says…"**You are the man**. **Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife...***[Don't miss the fact that David's taking of Bathseba to be his wife is part of the outrage that God identifies here.]***...and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 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 from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.' " Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD. " And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." So Nathan went to his house.** (Vs. 7b-15a)

Nathan rebukes David for his sin and then God speaks to David through Nathan—and God's statement is compelling! God says to David, "What were you thinking? I gave you everything; I gave you everything you wanted and more and if you wanted more, I would have given you still more." It isn't possible that anyone could have been more blessed than David. "Why did you do this evil in My sight? But, because you have chosen to do this, the sword will not depart from your house." David's words in chapter eleven come back to haunt him when he said, "Hey, that's the way it goes. You live by the sword; you die by the sword." And now David's going to experience what that means.

If you don't know how this story goes, it completes itself in 2 Samuel. David has a son who rapes his sister, David's daughter. David chooses not to do anything about it. He becomes very passive and so another one of David's sons, Absalom, kills his brother to avenge the raping of his sister and then he flees the country. Eventually he comes back and he leads a revolution against David. He chases David, the king, out of the palace and takes over. He takes David's wives up on the roof and has relations with them in broad daylight, just to make a mockery of his father. Eventually he is run through with a sword and David crawls back up on the throne, but neither David nor the kingdom would ever be the same again.

David clearly confesses his sin. Many theologians say the biggest difference between Saul and David is, David owned his sin. There isn't much said about his confession; it's fairly matter of fact in this chapter. If you want to see the full confession, it's in Psalm 51. David is clearly broken over his sin but, because of what David has done, he is assured that he is a forgiven man. God has heard that prayer but there are still consequences to sin and one of those consequences is this child, that never should have been conceived, will die.

> **Now the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!" But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; 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, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."**
>
> (Vs. 15b-23)

The child is struck with an illness and David is devastated. He lies on the floor and he weeps and he fasts and he begs God not to allow the child to die but the child, after seven days, dies. And David responds by basically cleaning himself up and getting back to life. His servants are a bit puzzled by this so they ask and he says, "Hey, while the child was alive, you never know! The grace of God is so unpredictable; maybe He would change His mind, so I begged Him." But the child dies and David accepts that and he must now go on with his life. And thus the story ends.

We find in our heart that we feel David's pain. We feel the disappointment; we feel the disaster of all this but there's something deep within us that resonates, "This was David's fault—you make your bed, you lie in it. If you're going to traffic in that kind of behavior, you pay the price; that's the way it works." Our hearts resonate with those words: **What David had done was evil**. While his soldiers were fighting for the kingdom, he's taking long naps. He sees this beautiful woman, the daughter and the wife of two of his best fighting soldiers, and he takes her and he commits adultery. She becomes pregnant and, rather than confessing his sin, he covers it up by not only killing Uriah, but others of his faithful soldiers. And in our hearts we feel like this is what he had coming! I crawl in the skin of Uriah's family and all this seems right; it seems just. This guy should pay the price for what he has done. All that seems as it should be...until verse 24.

> **Then David comforted his wife...***[No longer referred to as the wife of Uriah, she's now the wife of David.]***...Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her;** *[And I'm thinking, "You have got to be kidding me! Shouldn't part of the deal have been you can never touch this woman again? How many times in God's rebuke did he say,'The problem was that you took this woman who was not yours and you make her your wife!' If I was in charge,*

there's no question, I would say, 'Hands off! You have dozens of wives; don't ever touch this one again!'"] **...and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the LORD loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the LORD'S sake.** (Vs. 24-25)

The name Jedidiah means *God's friend.* Everything about this feels wrong! I'm in complete disagreement. He should have never been allowed to touch this woman again. Even when she was married to David, the text kept referring to her as *the wife or the widow of Uriah*. She never should have belonged to David, yet God allows her to have a son and, low and behold, this son will be the next king of Israel. David had dozens of sons by multiple wives—not this one! But not only would he be the next king of Israel—you guessed it—he shows up in Matthew, Chapter 1, as the one through whom the seed of the Messiah would travel—in the line of the King of Kings. As a matter of fact, in very unusual fashion, in the genealogy in Matthew 1, when Matthew records that, he even says, "Solomon came from David and Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Even in the genealogy, it's like Matthew can't come to grips with this. She wasn't even to be his wife! I'm telling you: if this came before the Board of Elders, I would side with Uriah's family. They are right! Because of what King David has done to these people, his behavior now seems to just make a mockery of that. It is so far over the line there is no way this should be acceptable. I find myself outraged; I find myself deeply offended.

And then…then I look in the mirror…then I look in the mirror…and suddenly I'm not quite so outraged; I'm not quite so offended. This is amazing! It's "…*amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I'm found; I was blind but now I see...my chains are gone; I've been set free!"* Suddenly I'm not quite so offended; I'm not so outraged. The scandalous grace that came to David has come to me and granted me the favor that he granted David. God reached into the trash pile and he found me and He made me His treasure; He called me to help and change the world. That's offensive; that's outrageous; that's scandalous! This grace is not soft; it's not comfortable; it's not predictable. It's kind of raw; it's kind of edgy and, at times, it seems to run contrary to everything we think is right. I don't know where you've been. I don't know what you've done. I don't know what has been done to you. I only know with all my heart, His grace is enough! God's grace is so scandalous, so contrary to everything that we think is right and decent that, who knows, God may choose to call you to change the world.

Our Father, we're thankful for Your grace. Lord, it isn't soft; it isn't safe; it isn't comfortable. Lord, it's just kind of unpredictable. It, at times, seems even offensive. Lord, every time I read this passage I'm offended. It just—everything seems wrong—till I look in the mirror and then I'm just thankful. Lord, my prayer would be for every single one of us here this morning—that we would walk back out these doors with a renewed sense of the wonder of Your grace. With all our hearts we would truly say, "This is amazing, but it's true! Lord, for that we give You thanks. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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