January 28/29, 2017

Then It Happened

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 11:1-27

Pastor Bryan Clark

You know, the story of David is really a remarkable story—kind of the classic rags to riches with God right in the center of it. He was a shepherd boy when God anointed him as the next King of Israel. He became a giant slayer as a teenager. He became a warrior. He ended up becoming a fugitive for well over a decade, fleeing for his life and growing up in the *Wilderness School of Leadership.* In that school God grew him into a man and into a leader of integrity and character and courage and compassion. Through a series of really kind of miraculous moments, David becomes King of Israel, and with the power of God and the guidance of God, with courage and integrity and leadership skill, he pulls the nation back together as one nation again. From there he builds an empire, really a remarkable empire, where his people could flourish. I think it would be accurate to say under David's leadership there has been no time that the nation of Israel has ever flourished like it flourished then: a time of peace, safety, security—at least true glimpses of shalom—where the people could flourish together, but not only for them, but for their pagan neighbors who were willing to abide by the law of God. It was really quite a remarkable story. And then it happened! One evening, one choice, and David would devastate his own life, his family, and his nation. Nobody gets up in the morning and says, "I think I'll ruin my life today." But every day that is exactly what happens to someone. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have your Bible, turn to 2 Samuel, Chapter 11. If you are visiting with us, we have been working our way through 1 and 2 Samuel. The middle part of 2 Samuel is really a celebration of all that David has accomplished. He has become king of an empire; what has been accomplished is remarkable. The people live in a way they never could have imagined. Everything is great! Chapter 11, verse 1:

> **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)

It may be odd to us to think that in the ancient world there was a war season. But it was just a practical reality. During the rainy season it was impossible to move and to fight, and so there was no real war during the rainy season. At the close of the rainy season—winter—then spring was considered war season. So the text tells us that. That is the season when kings go out to battle. In the ancient Near East kings were not figure heads; they were not administrators; they were warriors. That was their primary role. They led the army; they fought the battles. So it was the job of the king in the spring to go out to battle. But David stays home and sends Joab. One of the key terms that will be repeated again and again and again in this chapter is the word "*send*". It carries the idea of David, now with almost unlimited power, what will he do with this power? So it starts in verse 1. He will stay home and he will send Joab out to do his job for him. Verse 2:

> **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. 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. 2-3)

So David is just getting up from his mid-day nap. In the ancient Near East it was very common that after lunch you took a nap in the heat of the day, and worked more into the evening. But this was evening. David had virtually spent all afternoon in bed. You can't miss the contrast. While Joab and the army are out fighting for David, David is napping all afternoon. He is restless and he is bored. It's interesting to think about. What are the seasons of life when we are most vulnerable to temptation? I can assure you that David was far more vulnerable during this season of success than he ever was in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*. When life is good, everything is on auto pilot; we tend to get restless; we tend to get bored; and we tend to be at risk. David didn't go to war because he didn't need to. His empire was powerful; he could send Joab. He's napping all afternoon. He gets up on the roof; he's bored; he's restless, and he looks out and he sees a very beautiful woman. The Hebrew would indicate strikingly beautiful. In this story there are moments all along the way where David had an opportunity to turn his head and go a different direction before he made a mess of his life. There was this moment here where he saw a beautiful woman. He could have realized what was going through his head and quickly gone a different direction. When the story finally ends, many chapters from now, there is no question that David looks back on this moment and he wonders what could have been, had he made a different decision? I will guarantee you David ran this moment through his head thousands of times. But David doesn't stop himself. He sends someone to find out, "Who is that woman?"

The report comes back. She is the **daughter of Eliam and she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite**. It is very unusual in a Hebrew text that a woman is identified in the same text by both her father and her husband. In this case, both men were warriors. Both were counted among David's elite—the Navy Seals of his day—men loyal and willing to die for David. Eliam was of the family of David's favorite counselor. Bathsheba was the granddaughter of David's favorite counselor. So this is a family that has been loyal, a family who has put it all on the line, a family who would die for David in a heartbeat. You would like to think that in this moment, David stopped himself and realized that he had no business pursuing Bathsheba. Verse 4:

> **So David sent messengers and 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. And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."**
> (Vs. 4-5)

David does not stop himself, but continues to pursue Bathsheba in a gross abuse of power. The text doesn't linger; it's a series of verbs. We all know what happened and Bathsheba is sent on her way. There is a lot of discussion about Bathsheba's role in this. It's common for people to kind of read their own story into the text. The views go from one extreme to the other. One extreme would be that David physically captured her and raped her. The other extreme would be that this is what Bathsheba wanted all along, and then everything in between. What we actually know are a couple of things. One is that it's clear later in the David story that Bathsheba is a schemer. Whether she was in this story or not, we are not really told. There's also an interesting description when the text is going through the series of verbs. They are all masculine, reflecting David's doing the action, except one. And that is when the text says...**and when she came to him**. It is a Hebrew phrase that clearly has sexual overtones and is almost always used to describe kind of the first advance in a sexual encounter. That is in the feminine, which may be a hint that perhaps she was at least not resistant to the idea of this rendezvous with the king. What we do know for sure is that the text is pointed at David. David has the power; David makes the decision, and it is all David's fault. That is the clear intent of the text.

The text tells us that she was bathing when David first saw her. The text also tells us that she took this purification bath before she returned home. That is not referring to what we think of as a bath just to get clean. It actually is considered a purification bath that was common for a Hebrew woman to mark the end of her menstrual cycle. Often it was kind of a message to her husband that she was open to a sexual encounter. The idea here in this text is to be abundantly clear that she was not pregnant before this night with David. It leaves virtually no doubt in the text that the son belongs to David.

Now one has to wonder what was going through David's mind in that time between when Bathsheba went home and when she realized she was pregnant. Was David overcome with shame and guilt? Did David regret his decision? Did David just think that wasn't a good decision but we'll sweep it under the carpet; nobody needs to know; let's just move on. We aren't really told. What we're told is word comes back to David that Bathsheba is pregnant. Now the whole story has gotten much more complicated. This is again one of those moments where David had the opportunity to be courageous, to be a man of character and integrity and step up and admit what he did and deal with it like a leader. But like so many of us, David took a page out of Genesis 3—that in that moment there is something deep within us that goes into cover-up mode. "I'm going to hide; I'm going to cover, and I'm going to try to conceal my sin." So verse 6, Plan A:

> **The 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?" And 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 Plan A: Get Uriah to come home and sleep with his wife. So he sends word to Joab; Joab sends Uriah under the pretense of David wanting to know, "How's it going up there?" Notice the text does not record a single word of report out of the mouth of Uriah. It's the narrator's way of saying: We all know that's not what David's up to; there is no sense putting one single word of the report in the text, but quickly moves to David's plan. "Uriah, thanks for coming. Go home, spend an evening with your wife, and go back to the front." The idea of **wash your feet** is this Hebrew phrase that has strong sexual overtones. We would say, "Go home, kick your shoes off; spend a nice evening with your wife, and then go back." There's no question that is what David meant; there's no question that's what Uriah heard. Only he didn't. He spent the night with the servants. David becomes aware the next morning and asks Uriah why. Uriah, with great character and integrity, gives him two reasons. One is because it's strictly forbidden by the law that a soldier engaged in war does not come home and sleep with his wife. So, for the sake of what's right before God, he would not do it. Second, it's kind of a band of brother's thing. He said, "Hey, my brothers are out there living in tents, fighting the battle. How could I possibly come home, relax, spend an evening with my wife?" He absolutely, positively won't do it. Plan B: Verse 12:

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)

Plan B: Get the Hittite drunk. Maybe then he'll compromise his integrity and go home. David succeeds in getting him drunk, but even drunk Uriah will not go home and sleep with his wife. As one commentator said, "In this story, a drunk Hittite has more character than a sober king of Israel." That is exactly correct. Plan C:

Now in came about in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent *it* by the hand of Uriah. And 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. And 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. And 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)

It's an interesting paragraph. Uriah literally carries his own death warrant and delivers it to Joab. Joab is not stupid; he can figure out what's going on. In order for it to look like Uriah died in battle, he can't die alone, which means it will also cost him others of the elite army. So he picks his moment; he sends the valiant men forward, several of them die including Uriah the Hittite. He then delivers the message to a messenger who will take it to David. He is concerned that David will get angry, because it was a strategic error. Why would you send these valiant men, elite soldiers so close to the wall that they could be shot by archers off the top of the wall? That was a rookie mistake, so he's afraid David's going to bring that up. It goes back to a story in the book of Judges when the army got so close to the wall that a woman actually dropped a rock over the wall and killed Abimelech. Basically the idea is this: David's going to refer back to the story in Judges, remembering that's what happened, and Joab should have known better. Joab offers a reminder that part of that story is that it was a woman who dropped the stone that killed Abimelech. So about the time David's going off, remind him, "Oh by the way, it was a woman that dropped the stone over the wall that killed Abimelech, and by the way, Uriah the Hittite is dead." It's a creative way of saying, "David, we all know why these elite soldiers died. It has to do with a woman, and we both know who it is, and that's why these men died." It's Joab's way of saying, "We both know what you did, and I know what you're doing," and Joab will not forget he has this on David.

So the messenger departed and came and reported to David all that Joab had sent him to *tell*. And 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)

David's response at this moment in the story is very troubling! We find ourselves at this point in the story asking ourselves, "Who is this man? And what happened to David?" Basically the messenger delivers the message, "This is what happened. Several of your most loyal soldiers, your elite soldiers died, and among them was Uriah the Hittite." David's response in this moment was, "You win some and you lose some—no big deal—strengthen the army; finish the battle, and come home." Virtually a total disregard of the elite soldiers who were so committed to him, they were willing to die for him, and we find ourselves thinking, "Who is this David and what happened to the David we fell in love with...a David that was so passionate about his own men...a David who demonstrated again and again that he would die for his own men...a David who had established the kingdom with integrity, character, and a heart for God...a David, who had such compassion on Mephibosheth...a David that represented everything that a godly leader should be about?" And now David, through a series of bad choices, has a heart that's turning to stone. So when he finds out that, based on his sin, these men so loyal to him have given their lives, he doesn't seem to care. Verse 26:

Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. 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. (Vs. 26-27a)

Word comes back from the front that Uriah the Hittite is dead. Bathsheba grieves the loss of her husband. The normal grief period was seven days. Then David takes her into his home, makes her wife, and she gives him a son. Other than a handful of people on the inside that could do the math, most people would never know. David had almost unimaginable power and, in a gross abuse of power, he slept with another man's wife, got her pregnant, and to cover it up, not only her husband, but other elite soldiers had to die, and then he brought Bathsheba in to be his wife. Not only does it seem like he got away with it, but he benefited greatly by adding a son. Everything in this story would indicate David, with his great power and position, has somehow gotten away with this...except for the last line of the chapter:

But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD. (Vs. 27b)

That is the statement that comes right of what I refer to as the "duh" file. At the end of the story, we as the reader say, "Well, duh!" But it raises the question: why does the narrator say that? It is what we would refer to as an editorial comment. There is this ominous note at the end of the chapter that the story is not over, and David will not get away with anything. What lies ahead for David is an unimaginable nightmare, which we will look at more next week.

For this morning, I want to ask you a question: Where do you find yourself in this story? Some of you find yourself identified with the faithful soldiers, out with character and integrity doing the job. I hope that is where you find yourself this morning. That's awesome! Some of you... not so much... some of you are in the early stages of this story. You're bored; you're restless, and you're in a very vulnerable season of your life. Some of you have looked and taken a second look and you're thinking, "I wonder..." In your own mind you're absolutely convinced, "I would never do that...I just kind of wonder." You need to understand this morning: "You're at a place in the story where you can face that; you can confess that; you can stop that; you can get your head back together before there is further damage." I guarantee you that, at the end of the story, David will relive that night a thousand times over and wonder what would have happened if in that moment he would

have stopped and gone a different direction? Some of you are a little farther along in the story. You're actually imagining, fantasizing, wondering....in our language, texting, flirting, playing with fire. In your mind you're absolutely convinced, "I would never do that...but I just kind of wonder." It's still early in the story. You have every chance to stop before this gets out of hand if you're willing to be honest, to face it, confess it, recalibrate, and move down a different path. Some of you have crossed the line, and you know it. You are now engaged in behavior that you know is evil in the sight of the Lord. Maybe you're engaged in a sexual relationship with someone who is not your marriage partner. Maybe some of you are married, but you are engaged in a relationship with someone who is not your spouse. For some of you, it's pornography. You started by thinking this is harmless and now you are in deep and you cannot stop and you know it. For some of you, every day is now filled with lies and deception. Your energies are going into hiding, to lying, to deceiving, to making sure no one finds out. You've lost the joy of living, and every day for you is a day of bondage. You wake up every morning, and you wonder: how did this happen—and you know you are now in so deep. For some of you, maybe it's not a sexual sin. Maybe it's something else, but the moment I said it, you knew what it is. Maybe you're starting to cheat in your business. Maybe you're starting to cheat on your taxes. Maybe you're starting to steal from your employer. I don't know what it is, but you know what it is. You knew what it was the minute I said something.

Where are you in this story, and what is it going to take for you to be honest? What is it going to take for you to have the honesty and the courage and the character and the integrity to step up, to face your sin, to admit it, to confess it, and to deal with the consequences of your behavior? How much destruction is necessary before you stop? How much devastation to your own life? How much devastation to your family? How much devastation to the people around you will be necessary before you decide it's time to be honest and to have the courage to come clean? Some of you sitting here this morning, you're absolutely convinced somehow, someway you can cover it up; you can make it work. Here's the reality: You can fool every single one of us in the room. You can fool every single one in your life...**But the thing which David did was evil in the sight of the Lord**. You can't fool God, and you're deluded if you think God is going to sit by and watch one of His children destroy himself or herself and the people around without intervention.

There's nobody here waiting with a club to whack you when you confess your sin. Actually it's just the opposite. There are people with compassion, with kindness, that want to love you, that want to care for you, that want to walk with you, that want to help you find the forgiveness that is offered in Christ. They want to see you set free from the shame and the guilt and the bondage that defines your life every single day...people that want to help you get back on the path of life to give your soul what it is desperately longing for. But there is no way for that to happen until you take the first step and have the courage to be honest and say, "I need some help." So that's my question: "Where do you find yourself in this story? ...and what will be necessary before you're finally willing to be honest and to admit your sin?"

"Our Father, we are sobered by this part of the story this morning. God, I admit for months of telling this David story, I knew this morning was coming. God, it is heart breaking. One night, one decision will turn David's life into a nightmare. God, there are people here this morning in all stages of this story. Some are just starting down the path, and with courage and integrity can stop this morning, with little collateral damage. God, there are others so far down the path that every day has become a day of hiding, of guilt, and shame, living with the fear that someday somebody's going to find out. God, there is grace enough for everyone, if we choose to be honest and face our sin. May that be so, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2017 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

Then It Happened

Courage to Lead

II Samuel 11:1-27

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Do you feel you're more vulnerable to temptation in the wilderness or when life is easy and you're restless and bored? Why?

2. While no one gets up in the morning and decides to wreck his/her life that day, it happens every day to someone. The truth is no sin just happens, it is the result of a drift that has been happening for some time. What might that look like? What are the signs? When does that happen for you?

Bible Study

1. Do a quick review of the David story. What has God done for David?

2. Read II Samuel 11:1-13. What do you think are the factors that contributed to David's terrible choice to pursue Bathsheba? In the story, when was the moment of truth when David had the best chance to stop himself from going down this path? Why do you think he failed to stop himself from this sin? Compare James 1:14,15

3. When David is confronted with the consequences of his sin he immediately goes into cover up mode. Compare David's actions with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:7, 8. What seems to be our default action when we sin? What is the consequence of that action?

4. Read II Samuel 11:14-27. Not only is David now guilty of murder to cover up his sin, he has lost his moral authority to lead Joab because Joab knows his dirty little secret. In our modern culture we hear again and again that what someone does in his or her private life is not relevant to his or her role as a leader. This was the argument in defense of President Clinton for example. Biblically, is this true? Is one's private life relevant to the call to public leadership? Why or why not?

5. David has gone from being a man after God's own heart evident in his compassionate care of Mephibosheth (ch. 9), to a cold blooded murderer of those most loyal to him. How did David get to this place? What do we learn from this?

6. What do we learn about our sin from the last sentence in II Samuel 11? Why does the writer add that comment (editorial comment)? Can anyone really cover up sin?

Application

1. What are three practical lessons we learn from this story to avoid traveling down David's path?

2. Where are you in the story? Bored and restless? Inquiring? Considering? Acting? Lying and deceiving to cover up the sin? Read together Psalm 139:23, 24

3. Is there anything you're hiding that you need to share with someone you trust?

Copyright 2016 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.