

Broken and Building Up

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The notorious Jack sidled up to the pastor. “Pastor, I confess.” The pastor, taken aback by the unexpected piety, exclaimed, “At last! You’ve seen the light!” Jack smirked. “I stole a chicken, Pastor.” The pastor’s expression turned grave. “That’s a terrible sin, Jack.” “I know, Pastor. I feel awful about it. If I gave you the chicken, would you accept it?” The pastor shook his head. “No, Jack. You must return it to the owner.” “But, Pastor, he refused to accept it back,” Jack pleaded. “Well, in that case...” The pastor trailed off, considering the dilemma. “I suppose you could keep it. But you must repent...” Before the pastor could explain true repentance, Jack quickly left, saying, “Thanks, Pastor!” Upon returning home, the pastor discovered one of *his* chickens had gone missing.

Jack’s deception of the pastor illustrates how easily we can rationalize our sins. This tendency to justify our wrongdoings is not new. In fact, we see a powerful example of this in the life of King David, as recorded in 2 Samuel.

We fear the exposure of our sins because we may experience shame or punishment when our evil deeds are revealed. The first characteristic of a person who has sinned is often an attempt to hide it.

David exemplifies this. After sending Uriah to his death, Bathsheba mourned him and David took her into his house. He would not have wanted to ruin his image as a faithful servant of God. While the specific details are not described, David may have made some kind of excuse to people when he took her in. Perhaps he claimed that he would personally take care of the widow of his faithful servant. He might have spread rumors that the child she was pregnant with was Uriah’s.

Despite David’s attempts to hide his sin, the true story might have spread throughout the palace because his messengers, servants, and Joab knew some of the truth behind it. Yet, due to his power as king, no one dared confront him.

A worse situation than hiding our sins is not even recognizing them. David committed the sins of adultery and murder, yet he didn't repent for nearly ten months. It seems as though he had rationalized his sins and overcome his guilt. Even after the child born from his sin, he didn't realize his wrongdoing. Compared to other kings, his actions might not have seemed egregious, but Scripture clearly states it "displeased the Lord" (v. 27). Regardless of our perception, sin is what God hates.

What about us? We might have habits we don't recognize as sin or deliberately ignore. Perhaps they may not seem like a big deal. Others may do "that kind of thing" all the time. However, if it's something God doesn't want, we must boldly cut ties with it. We must change our hearts and actions. Let's take a moment now to quietly examine our hearts. Are there areas in your life where you've become numb to sin? Are there actions you've been rationalizing? Ask God to reveal these to you and give you the courage to face them.

God's first step in changing the situation was sending Nathan to David. Ironically, David had often used messengers to fulfill his sinful desires, even orchestrating Uriah's murder. David's actions were schemes to harm others. Yet, God sent Nathan with a message to spiritually awaken David. This wasn't merely to condemn David but to give him a chance to return to the right path. God didn't want David to become another Saul. So, just as the Lord had sent Samuel to Saul, the *same Lord* sent Nathan to David.

Just as God sent Nathan to wake up David's slumbering spirit, today the Lord sends God's Word to awaken our own. The primary channel is the Bible itself. That's why it's crucial for us to read and meditate on the Word. If we don't feel a holy challenge when reading the Scriptures, we might be spiritually dull.

God also speaks through sermons and experiences in worship services. You come here seeking God's Word, trusting in its power to reveal truth through our gatherings. I am human and imperfect, but I prepare my messages prayerfully, believing God can speak through me. Also, God speaks through our communal sharing. This is why we should cherish our worship.

You too can be a messenger for *the same God* who sent Nathan to David. Not just pastors, but all believers can be prophets. Jesus Christ, God's Word made flesh, lives within us. This means every Christian can be God's mouthpiece. Let's ensure our words reflect God's heart and respect one another. And let's respect each other's words.

However, becoming God's messenger can be challenging. Nathan had to risk his life to convey God's rebuke to David. Yet, it was Nathan's obedience that was the decisive factor in David's repentance. We too must be sensitive to the guidance of God's Spirit and obedient so that we can proclaim God's Word wherever our Lord calls us. I pray that you will be one of those people.

Now, in verses 2 to 4, Nathan speaks to David in a parable. This is wisdom given by God. The reason he spoke in this way was not to condemn David and destroy his heart but to lead David to repent of his sin and restore his heart toward the Lord.

The parable described a greedy rich man unjustly taking a poor man's only possession, one little ewe lamb. This was clearly an evil act for anyone to hear. It was a violation of the commandments "You shall not steal" and "You shall not covet your neighbor's." So, without realizing it was a parable, David expressed his anger at the rich man and declared firmly, "The man who has done this deserves to die."

Even after Nathan's story, David didn't recognize his own guilt. For at least ten months, he must have attended sacrifices to the Lord. However, even there, David did not realize his sin. It was because he, who had loved God, had become immersed in religious customs and had become a 'religious person' rather than a 'worshiper.' Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, typical religious figures of Jesus' time, he was quick to judge others harshly but blind to his own flaws.

Then, Nathan pointed out to David that *he* was the greedy rich man (7a). David, accustomed to the position of a ruler who was not judged by others and only judged them, was once again struck by God's word. He realized that he was the one who had hurt others and damaged the wholeness of God's people and creation. That's what sin does! Through that powerful challenge, the false self he had maintained through rationalizing sin was shattered. In fact, he had already been broken by sin but had forcibly propped it up with his kingly power and false logic. However, when God's word struck his soul, he collapsed. And David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13a).

Today, God sends us to "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15) for God's glory and the favor of people, just as Nathan did for David. David's sin emerged from his dullness and indifference to others' lives. His restoration began with the realization that he had spoiled others' lives for his own sinful desires and greed.

This stark reminder serves as a mirror for us today. Are we truly mindful of the impact of our actions on those around us? Do we prioritize our desires over the well-being of others? May we, like David, experience a profound awakening and turn away from our sinful paths. Let us strive to build relationships rooted in love, empathy, and mutual respect, reflecting the heart of God in all that we do.

Like David, we all face the temptation to hide or rationalize our sins. But the Triune God, in God's grace, sends us 'Nathans' – God's Word, fellow believers, and the Holy Spirit - to awaken us. When we humbly receive this truth spoken in love, confess our sins, and lean on our faith community, we can experience the restoring power of God's forgiveness and grace. Let us strive to be both receptive to truth and willing to speak it in love, building up the body of Christ in unity and maturity. Amen.