

Message #25

Kurt Hedlund

Life of David

6/21/2020

DAVID AND A FATHER'S EFFORT TO COVER UP SIN

2 SAMUEL 11

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Today is indeed Father's Day. Do we have any fathers here today who are over 75? Any who are over 85?

There is probably no other time in American history when it has been more important to honor fathers. While our country is dealing with an epidemic of the corona virus, we are also dealing with an epidemic of fatherlessness. According to the Census Bureau, one third of all children in the US live in a household without their biological dad. Forty percent of all births today happen apart from marriage. The sociologists tell us that many of our national ills are traceable to fatherlessness. One evidence of this is that 85% of all incarcerated youth in our country come from a family without a father in the home. (Texas Department of Corrections)

At the same time traditional marriage is subject to criticism from our national elites. Yet Professor Bradford Wilcox, who heads up the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia argues, **"Compared to the average American family man, evangelical Protestant men who are married with children and attend church regularly spend more time with their children and their spouses. They also are more affectionate with their children and their spouses. They also have the lowest rates of domestic violence of any group in the United States."** (*Christianity Today*, 8/2004)

In our study of the life of David we have seen that this Old Testament character has both assets and liabilities as a father. He has left his children and their descendants a legacy of faith as evidenced by his behavior in the midst of difficult trials and by his Psalms, which became a part of the Biblical record. But as we are seeing with his behavior toward Bathsheba and Uriah, he also left a permanent stain on that record which will have grave implications for his family.

In 1984 an unemployed cleaning woman in St. Louis noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home. Since there were only a few, she made no effort to deal with them. Over the summer the bees continued to fly in and out of the attic vent while the woman remained unconcerned. But then one day the ceiling of the second floor bedroom caved in under the weight of hundreds of pounds of honey and thousands of angry bees. While the woman escaped serious injury, she had a difficult time dealing with the damage that resulted from the festering problem. (*Leadership*, Winter 1986, p. 41)

David has been collecting a beehive in his romantic life. In violation of God's law, he has acquired multiple wives. In the first five verses of #11 of 2 Samuel we saw last week that he had violated four Biblical principles. First, he should have been singular in his romantic interest. Second, he should have stayed busy with the work before him. Third, he should have guarded his eyes. Fourth, he should have fled immorality.

David's sin, unfortunately, does not stop there. He proceeds in an effort to cover up his wrongdoing. Such is the temptation of sin that originated in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sought to cover up their sin. Today we will examine the consequences of David's cover up.

I.

In vv. 1-5 of #11 we will look at DAVID AND THE VICTIM OF THE COVER UP. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. DAVID AND THE VICTIM...) We looked at these first five verses last Sunday, but today we will look at them to see what they tell us about the victim of the cover up. We read, beginning in v. 1, **"In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, 'Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'"**

We noted last time that it was expected in this era for kings to lead their army into battle. David stayed home. That was a problem. (DAVID 14D) The Israelite army was fighting the Ammonites, who lived to the east of Israel, on the far side of the Jordan River. They were laying siege to their capital city, which was Rabbath-Ammon, what we know today as Amman, Jordan.

We mentioned briefly last week that Uriah was an army captain and the husband of Bathsheba. I would like to explore his background a bit more. He is called “the Hittite.” (DAVID 14G) There was a Hittite Empire which occupied most of what we know today as Turkey and extended all the way down to Israel. It reached its zenith of power in the time of Moses several centuries earlier. Remnants of that empire continued for several centuries longer. There are a few references to people from this empire in the Old Testament.

“Hittites,” however, is the most commonly used term to refer to a different people group, to the descendants of Heth. In Genesis #10 v. 15 (GENESIS 10:15) we are told, **“Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth...”** Canaan was the son of Ham, who was the son of Noah. So as the name of Heth’s father implies, the descendants of Heth were part of the Canaanites who inhabited the Promised Land.

In Genesis #23 Abraham sets out to buy a plot of land in which to bury his family members. (GENESIS 23:7-8) According to Genesis #23 vv. 7-10, **“Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites [literally the text says ‘sons of Heth’], the people of the land. And he said to them, ‘If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, (GENESIS 23:9) that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.’ (GENESIS 23:10) Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city...”** It was here in Hebron, the first capital of King David, in which most of these early patriarchs were buried.

When Moses and Joshua led the Hebrews from Egypt into the Promised Land of Canaan five centuries later, God told them to destroy the Canaanites, because they would be a corrupting influence. But in (JUDGES 1:28) Judges #1 v. 28 we are told, **“When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely.”**

So like our own Native Americans these Hittites were earlier occupiers of the land, and many of them were destroyed by foreign invaders. Like our own African Americans many of the Hittites had been subjected to some form of slavery. But as is true of most African Americans, Uriah’s Hittite ancestors came to know the true God. For Uriah’s name literally means “YHWH is the Light.” Uriah and his parents were apparently true believers.

Uriah became involved in the Israeli Defense Force. His skill and bravery in battle earned him a place in the officer corps. To David’s credit, his background as a foreigner and a Gentile did not keep him from

this position. In 2 Samuel #23 vv. 18 & 39 (2 SAMUEL 23:18, 39) we are told, **“Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruah, was chief of the thirty.... Uriah the Hittite: thirty-seven in all.”** What we have in the intervening verses is a listing of all of the top officers in the military. The mention of “thirty-seven in all” suggests that there were losses due to death and retirement such that there were more than thirty in all. But the group of these top officers was referred to as “the thirty.” Uriah was among them.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Now here is the issue and the connection to David’s sin and cover up. Did David think that Bathsheba was deserving of one better than this native Canaanite and this descendant of slaves? As David’s sin progresses, did David think that Uriah’s mistreatment and loss would have less downside risk because he was not an Israelite and because he had a less influential power group which he represented? Would his loss be less noticed because Uriah was not a real Israelite?

We are not told all that went through David’s mind. But we know from the history of our own country that part of our evil human sin nature is to think in these ways, is it not? Certainly it should not be part of the thinking of the true people of God. But David is acting in some truly evil ways. His behavior is especially evil because Uriah is an honorable and God-fearing man.

II.

In vv. 6-9 of our passage we come to DAVID AND THE EFFORT TO GET URIAH WITH HIS WIFE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. DAVID AND THE EFFORT...) According to vv. 6 & 7, **“So David sent word to Joab, ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite.’ And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going.”** The description of David’s sin with Bathsheba was brief. But the text now becomes more detailed in its description of David’s multiplying evil.

The news of Bathsheba’s pregnancy would have come some weeks after their encounter. The text does not give us the impression that this was a continuing relationship, although that is possible. But now David has a problem. Bathsheba’s husband has been away at war. How can this pregnancy be explained? The most obvious solution in David’s mind is to get Uriah home with his wife.

Was it unusual for the king to ask for a specific officer to return from the front to give a report? We don’t know. Is anyone suspicious about David’s behavior? We know that there was somebody on the royal staff who went to inquire about Bathsheba, and there was someone who brought Bathsheba to

him. Verse 5 implies that there was someone who went from Bathsheba to David with the message about her pregnancy. Now Joab has been asked for Uriah to be sent. Does he have any suspicion about something not being quite right? David is going to have a tough time covering this up.

Verse 8: **“Then David said to Uriah, ‘Go down to your house and wash your feet.’ And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king.”** David obviously wants Uriah to spend time with his wife. What do you suppose was the present which he sent along? Champagne? Expensive perfume? Gift certificate for a nice restaurant?

Verse 9: **“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.”** Probably Uriah stayed with the palace guard. Why did he not go down and see his wife? He sees himself as still being on duty. In effect, he is helping the palace guard to defend the king who has taken his wife. Uriah prefers the guardroom to the bedroom.

There was no Old Testament law that prohibited Uriah from spending time with his wife. But there are hints in the Hebrew Bible that godly soldiers and leaders saw their battles as part of a holy war, which meant that they were supposed to stay away from women. In 1 Samuel #21, for example, David fled from King Saul and went to the high priest. He requested food and weapons from Ahimelech, but the only food available was the bread in the sanctuary. (1 SAMUEL 21:4) In v. 4 of #21 we are told, **“And the priest answered David, ‘I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread--- if the young men have kept themselves from women.’”** It is implied that an important royal mission would require sexual restraint.

Uriah's response to David's offer in our story shows that the Hittite has more commitment to this holy war than does the king. Uriah's behavior should have convicted David of his need to stop his sinful pursuit. But sin has a way of getting worse.

III.

In vv. 10-13 we come to DAVID AND THE EFFORT TO GET URIAH DRUNK. (III. DAVID AND THE EFFORT TO...) Look at v. 10: **“When they told David, ‘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?’”** The original word for “journey” was sometimes used of a military campaign. It is obvious what David wants. Uriah might begin to wonder what David's motivation is. David was supposed to be a supporter of holy war. But then the king was supposed to lead his army in such a war. Why was David acting like this?

Verse 11: **“Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, 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? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.’”** We learn here that the Ark of the Covenant was taken from Jerusalem to the battlefield for this conflict. David should have been there as well. Uriah was unwilling to do legitimately what David did illegitimately. Uriah is the David that David should be. The army captain sees no purpose in staying in Jerusalem any longer.

Thus we read in vv. 12 & 13, **“Then David said to Uriah, ‘Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.’ So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.”** In v. 11 Uriah spoke of eating and drinking and lying with his wife. David gets Uriah to do two of the three. But he will not lie with his wife. Uriah under the influence is more pious than David is sober. David can steal his wife, but he cannot manipulate the woman’s husband.

IV.

In vv. 14-17 we encounter DAVID AND THE EFFORT TO GET URIAH DEAD. (IV. DAVID AND THE EFFORT...) Verses 14 & 15 tell us, **“In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, ‘Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.’”** How could the man after God’s heart do such a thing? It is a warning to all of us about the capacity of the sin nature. Scottish pastor from the 1800s Robert Murray McCheyne contends, **“Every sin known to man is in each of our hearts.”**

How ironic that Uriah’s death warrant is sent to General Joab by Uriah. David trusts Uriah not to read his message, although the message may have been sealed in a royal pouch. It is also debated among scholars as to how widespread the ability to read was in this era. David continues his pursuit of evil. We may wonder what has happened to his conscience.

Consider also that the one whom David is trusting to carry out this evil deed is the one whom David cursed for murdering General Abner. He trusts that Joab is willing to act as his hatchet man. Such is the character of Joab. He is willing to sacrifice one of his best officers to satisfy his boss. (DEUTERONOMY 27:24) In Deuteronomy #27 v. 24 God’s law declared, **“‘Cursed be anyone who strikes down his neighbor in secret.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”**

Whereas Joab was in debt to David for not having him killed or fired for his murder of General Abner, Joab now has a “get out of jail free” card from David. Obviously there is something wrong for David to give him such an order. Joab probably knew that Uriah had a gorgeous wife. He knew something of David’s romantic history. Perhaps his suspicions are along the right line. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verses 16 & 17: **“And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died.”** David just intended for Uriah to be killed. But Joab saw a problem that his own actions as general might make it look like he was just trying to get Uriah killed. It seemed better to him to have more people killed. He thought that this would provide a better cover.

Thus David’s pursuit of sin and its cover up has produced additional collateral damage. Others have been killed because of his sin. How do you suppose that the families of these additional victims felt if they ever learned the truth behind the deaths of their loved ones? David has broken the commandment about coveting his neighbor’s wife. This has led to breaking the commandment about adultery. This has led to the cover up plan which involves violation of the commandment about bearing false witness. Now he is breaking the commandment about murder.

V.

In vv. 18-27 we come to DAVID AND THE EFFORT TO TIE UP LOOSE ENDS. (PROJECTOR ON--- V. DAVID AND THE EFFORT...) Look at vv. 18-21: **“Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. And he instructed the messenger, ‘When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, then, if the king’s anger rises, and if he says to you, “Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast 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.””**

Joab has caused more casualties than David had anticipated, but it seemed necessary to Joab to modify David’s plan. Joab anticipated how David would react to this news. They were both military men. They had studied the same military history, and Joab expected that David would make reference to the incident involving Abimelech.

In Judges #9 Abimelech the son of Gideon killed all of his brothers, leaving him the only heir of this famous judge. Somewhat later he attacked a town that had rebelled against him. The town of Thebez was captured. The remaining citizens fled into a tower in that town. As Abimelech went to set fire to the tower, a woman threw a millstone down on him, which struck him in the head and killed him. The point is that Abimelech was foolish to go so near the tower, as Joab was seemingly foolish in having his troops go so near the wall of the Ammonite capital.

The news about Uriah's death is all that David will really care about. Joab knows that any concern about his general's tactics will be overshadowed by this news.

Verses 22-24: **"So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, 'The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.'"** The messenger gives the whole story before David has a chance to get upset. So this messenger has some knowledge of the untimely death of Uriah. What do you suppose that he thinks? Certainly he must have had questions about what was going on.

Verse 25: **"David said to the messenger, 'Thus shall you say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him.'"** Literally David's message says, "Do not let this be evil in your sight." This is no big deal. You win some. You lose some. David does not seem to be upset. In truth he is relieved. His plan seems to be successful. A few extra people have died, but the important thing is that he and his sin have been covered up. He is going to come out looking OK. The loose ends have been tied up.

Such is what sin can produce: death and destruction. Serious sin has a tendency to snowball. It tends to hurt other people.

Verse 26: **"When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband."** Notice how Bathsheba is described by the narrator. She is not Bathsheba, she is the wife of Uriah.

How do you suppose that she found out? Did David tell her? Bathsheba, I am so sorry to get the news that Uriah has died in battle. He was a hero. How do you suppose that her relationship with David was affected when and if she found out how Uriah had really died? Did David ever explain what happened to his kids?

It is theoretically possible that Bathsheba was unhappy in her marriage to Uriah. It is possible that she had her eye on King David. But did she really want Uriah dead? It is important, though, to see that the narrator places the blame for what happened upon King David.

Typically the mourning period for the deceased would be seven days. How do you suppose that David's other wives reacted? Did any of them have suspicions? If and when they learned the truth, how would the news affect their relationship with David?

In the first part of v. 27 we read, **“And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son.”** Isn't this precious.? The kind and generous king has graciously intervened to rescue this poor war widow to ensure her security and to add her to his harem. Thus the loose ends are all tied up, or are they? Are there not some who know something about what is going on? More importantly, there is the second part of v. 27

VI.

In the second part of v. 27 we encounter DAVID AND THE ALL-SEEING JUDGE. (VI DAVID AND THE ALL-SEEING JUDGE) Here is the only specific reference to God in the chapter. But it comes at just the right time: **“But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.”** The NASV translation is more literal and more forceful: **“But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord.”**

In Psalm 11 v. 4 (PSALM 11:4) this same King David once wrote, **“The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.”**

Paul Tillich is off in much of his theology. But he gets it right here when he observes, **“Our entire inner life, our thoughts and desires, our feelings and imaginations, are known to God.... The human resistance against such relentless observation can scarcely be broken. (PROJECTOR OFF) Every psychiatrist and confessor is familiar with the tremendous force of resistance in each personality against even trifling self-revelations. Nobody wants to be known, even when he realizes that his**

health and salvation depend upon such a knowledge. We do not even wish to be known by ourselves. We try to hide the depths of our souls from our own eyes. We refuse to be our own witness. How then can we stand the mirror in which nothing can be hidden?" (sermon "Escape from God," *Christianity Today*, 6/2013)

Where does this leave the Uriahs and the George Floyds and the other victims of injustice in this world? The assurance here is that God sees. The judge of all the world will act justly. He will hold David accountable. The officer who killed George Floyd will be punished. Necessary police reform is being enacted. Yet Uriah and George Floyd are still dead. The only hope for ultimate justice and reward lies beyond the grave. Our responsibility is to make sure that we have trusted in Jesus who died to pay the penalty for our sins. Our primary claim must be upon the mercy of Christ, trusting that He will do what is right.

For all of us on this side of the grave there is the promise and the warning that God sees and he does tune in to evil. British scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins concedes in his book *Outgrowing God*, **"Whether irrational or not, it does, unfortunately seem plausible that, if somebody sincerely believes God is watching his every move, he might be more likely to be good."**

So the challenge, especially to us fathers, comes from 1 Corinthians #10 vv. 12 & 13: **"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:13) No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."** Next week we will see that even in the midst of terrible sin, there is hope. For there is the possibility of forgiveness.