

And The Woman Was Very Beautiful
2 Samuel 11
August 27, 2023
Rev. Dave Dorst
CenterPoint Church

Introduction

The Museum of the Bible has a Facebook page that posts things from time to time. Earlier in the year, this was their post about a historical event: “We’ve all made a typo or two along the way, but most likely you haven’t made one as serious as Robert Barker in 1631. Barker was a printer who reportedly created 1,000 Bibles with one of the most notorious typographical errors in Bible printing history. One of the Ten Commandments omits the essential command “not,” making Exodus 20:14 read: *‘Thou shalt commit adultery’* instead of *‘Thou shalt not.’* Barker was fined €300 for the error.” That edition became known as the “Wicked Bible.”¹

Well, our text today might be mistaken to be part of that Wicked Bible. One of God’s chosen leaders, King David, was a bit confused as to whether adultery was permitted or not. Of course, we all know that he was not really confused, but that he rationalized his sin in his own mind and let his dark desires get the best of him. It’s hard to see why a man who had everything going for him and had been incredibly blessed by God would fall into this kind of sin. As Chuck Swindoll points out, “David is at an all-time high. He is fresh off a series of great victories on the battlefield. He has reached the peak of public admiration. He has ample money, incredible power, unquestioned authority, remarkable fame.”² We could add to that that he has received the promise from God that his descendants would sit on his throne forever. But rolling in the good times can leave us feeling invincible and entitled. Our spiritual lives don’t always shine or grow when we’re prospering. And we’ve all heard the saying about power corrupting. We’ll follow David down his path of sin as the writer of Samuel lays it out for us, and see where David went wrong and then compounded that wrong with even more wrong. And if we don’t see ourselves as being in danger of these same kinds of sin, then we misunderstand our humanity and natural depravity. (*Warning: PG-13 rating*)

As I reflected on this passage, I was reminded of James 1:14-15: “*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*” What other story in Scripture better embodies those verses than this one, with desire, conception, and death? So those are our three points: 1) Lured and Enticed by Desire, 2) Desire Gives Birth to Sin, and 3) Sin Fully Grown Brings Forth Death.

I. Tempted, Lured, and Enticed By His Own Desire (vv. 1-4)

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.* ² *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.* ³ *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?”* ⁴ *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.*

¹ Museum of the Bible’s FB post from January 14, 2023

² Charles Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Dallas: Word, 1997), p. 182

I'm sure that you've heard the Ben Franklin quote, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." The writer Thoreau had a similar phrase: "The devil finds work for idle hands." Isaac Watts, the hymnwriter, said it as, "Satan always finds some mischief for idle hands to do."³ All saying the same thing that the first verse of our chapter is getting at: "*In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle... David remained in Jerusalem.*" Hmm... David the warrior staying idly at home laying around on couches instead of accompanying his troops... what could go wrong? So David went walking one afternoon and saw a woman bathing. And his idle hands let Satan find mischief for him. The text does not say that the woman was beautiful, it says that she was "very beautiful," which, when they emphasize that in the Hebrew language, they really mean it. You'd think, though, that David having multiple wives and concubines would have easily turned away from seeing this beautiful woman. He was not starved for intimate relations. But sexual sin doesn't work quite like that. When someone has decided not to limit their sexual appetite to one person, they get used to getting their way and adding new partners. So, in that sense, it was only a matter of time before David would commit adultery. When you train yourself to be faithful to your spouse and not lust after other women, it becomes much easier to say no to extramarital affairs. I have a T-shirt that says, "Love one woman, many guitars." The secret to a beautiful life.

John Woodhouse points out that this account has language that should remind us of the garden of Eden and the Fall of Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:6 says that Eve saw... the tree was good... a delight to the eyes... to be desired... she took of its fruit and ate. David here saw... the woman was good/beautiful... he desired her... he took her... and lay with her. Different kind of sin, but the same process of illicit desire and taking.⁴

The text says that David "*took her.*" Yes, it also says that "*she came to him,*" but was she in a position to refuse him? Was Bathsheba a willing party? The text doesn't say one way or the other. She certainly mourns the loss of her husband later, but we'll also see her manipulating power at the end of David's life. Regardless of her complicity in the sin, the focus is on David's actions; we know that he had the power to stop things and didn't. The text does not paint a picture of rape necessarily, but certainly of the most powerful man in the land abusing that power over one of his married subjects. There have been some questionable interpretations of this story that let David off the hook:

-There is a passage in the Jewish writing called the Talmud that says that God had always meant for David to marry Bathsheba, but David had sinned by giving her to Uriah as a reward for his help in battle. So David marrying Bathsheba, in the end, was only setting things right. Hmm.⁵

-Another story from the Talmud (and I'm not making this up) insists that Bathsheba had put a screen around her bathing area, but that Satan had taken the form of a bird and sat on the screen. David shot an arrow at the bird, missed, and knocked down the screen (which is what Satan intended), and then saw what he couldn't resist. So really, it's no one's fault except Satan.⁶

-The Sight & Sound Theatre in Lancaster had their yearly play last year on David's life. When the play gets to this incident with Bathsheba, it emphasizes that David was stressed out and overwhelmed with all the demands on him as king. And that's what the play says drove him to in Bathsheba's arms.

-I mentioned that Richard Gere movie version of David's life a few sermons ago – it almost completely exonerates David by imagining that David never sent for Bathsheba after he saw her

³ <https://www.therandomvibez.com/idle-hands-sayings-quotes/>

⁴ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 289.

⁵ Jonathan Kirsch, *King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel* (New York: Ballantine, 2001), p. 188.

⁶ Kirsch, p. 201.

bathing. Instead, she comes to him later and says that she will be his wife if he will arrange for her husband to be killed, since he beats her.

I don't see any evidence in the Bible for any of those versions – blaming it on God, Satan, Bathsheba, or the stresses of being king. I think the Scriptures present a straightforward account of a powerful man who had a lot of sexual partners and was always on the lookout for new ones, so thought very little of taking this one, even after he found out who she was. The text tells us the names of her father, Eliam, and of her husband, Uriah, but it doesn't tell us if that information had any relevance to David. If you're reading quickly through the text, you might assume that David didn't know these guys. But he did know them, they were part of his band of mighty men, the men who had fought with him, supporting him through thick and thin. But David did not care, he had set his selfish heart on her. But he did not actually want her, as C.S. Lewis explains in his book *The Four Loves*:

“We use a most unfortunate idiom when we say, of a lustful man prowling the streets, that he ‘wants a woman.’ Strictly speaking, a woman is just what he does not want. He wants a pleasure for which a woman happens to be the necessary piece of apparatus. How much he cares about the woman as such may be gauged by his attitude to her five minutes after fruition (one does not keep the carton after one has smoked the cigarettes).”⁷

David has started treating everyone around him as objects, as pawns for him to order around and use. He has become the kind of king that God warned Israel against.

One of the last comments in verse 4 is that Bathsheba had been purifying herself from her uncleanness; in other words she was done menstruating that month. Why would the author point out this detail? I see four potential reasons (might be all of them):

- 1 - to explain why she was bathing; she wasn't trying to catch the king's eye, as some commentators believe, but making herself ceremonially clean according to God's law.
- 2 - to point out the irony that David did not break the ceremonial law that forbid laying with a woman who was unclean from menstruation, but then broke the moral law of adultery.
- 3 - to point out that she was now fertile and so what comes next is not quite as big a shock.
- 4 - to show how it was impossible that her husband could have impregnated her, since he had been away in battle and she had her monthly cycle proving that she wasn't already pregnant.

Why is that important? Because sin has consequences, and

II. Desire Conceived Gives Birth to Sin (vv. 5-13)

⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, “I am pregnant.” ⁶ So David sent word to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. 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. 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. 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?” 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.” ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Inspirational Writings of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Inspirational, 1987), p. 263.

David probably had moved on to other matters of his kingdom and tucked away his night with the married woman, thinking that he'd gotten away with it. Until he received the news that Bathsheba was pregnant. How would he deal with that? Come clean and make things right? If only... Now, if you paused reading at verse 6 or 7, you might have thought that David was bringing Uriah back to town to confess the whole affair, to apologize and ask what he could do to make things right, and to let Uriah take care of his pregnant wife. David was usually a pretty upstanding guy, trying to do the right thing, even when it didn't benefit him. But not here, David wasn't ready to come clean, he preferred to cover up what he had done. It's always easier to keep covering up our sin, it takes a lot of courage to confess it and deal with its consequences. And David took the cowardly way here.

David's first scheme was to invite Uriah back from the war and offer him a night to spend with his wife so that he would sleep with her and then assume that her child was his. But Uriah had too much integrity to sleep with his wife while the rest of the army was sleeping in the fields in between battles; it wouldn't be right for him to enjoy the comforts of home. So David revised the scheme, figuring that Uriah would act differently if he got him drunk. But Uriah was so upstanding that even inebriated he acted like an honorable soldier. All of this is a rebuke of David's despicable conduct, of course. Uriah said, "how could I go sleep with my wife while the rest of the army is out camping on the front lines?" You wonder if David's conscience started to trouble him at all, if he thought, "Well, I slept with your wife while my army was fighting the war for me."

Some commentators see Uriah's refusal here as him acting with the knowledge that David had impregnated her; that he must have heard the palace gossip and refused both to go into his sullied wife as well as play along with David's coverup scheme. If that's true, then the narrator has chosen to make that very difficult to read into his words. It's possible, but it seems more likely that Uriah is more upright and full of integrity than he is full of restrained anger and calculated revenge. Uriah would pay for his integrity with his life. You can imagine David's inner thoughts: "Well, I tried to work this all out without any bloodshed, but this guy just won't cooperate. He's not leaving me any choice here." In the last fourteen verses, we see literally that

III. Sin Fully Grown Brings Forth Death (vv. 14-27)

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵In 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." ¹⁶And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. ¹⁷And 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. ¹⁸Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. ¹⁹And he instructed the messenger, "When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, ²⁰then, 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?' ²¹Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubesheth? 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.'" ²²So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. ²³The 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. ²⁴Then 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." ²⁵David 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." ²⁶When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

What had started as an “innocent” glance down from the rooftop of the palace had now mushroomed into a huge incident, with Uriah and several other troops dead as the result of David’s manipulating battle strategy to expose the man that he wanted killed. You may remember back in 1 Samuel 18 that Saul tried that very tactic on David – sending him to battle in the hopes that the Philistines would kill him. It obviously hadn’t worked, but it’s another reminder that David has disappointingly sunk down to Saul’s level as king, maybe below him. This is the David who could have killed Saul several times when Saul was hunting him down, but chose not to. Now he killed a man who had never done him any harm because his lust took him down a rabbit hole of sin and scheming. And he implicated Joab in this scheme, and had the audacity to brazenly counsel him at the end of it: *“Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another.”* In other words, Hey, people die in battle, don’t take on any guilt about that. But really, it was David who devoured Uriah; but the king would prefer everyone just accept what happened as necessary and just part of life. Go ahead and move on, don’t mourn, get back to attacking the Ammonites.

Bathsheba grieved the death of her husband, and as soon as the tears were dried, David sent for her to marry her so she would have his son in his palace. David has broken four of the ten commandments in this story: the sixth (“do not murder”), seventh (“do not commit adultery”), eighth (“do not steal”), and tenth (“do not covet your neighbor’s wife”). Little wonder that the last sentence of the chapter says that *“the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.”* That’s both a cliffhanger that will propel us into the action of Chapter 12 next week, but also a contrast to what David had said to Joab in verse 25: *“Do not let this matter displease you.”* David could control the emotions and reactions of his subordinates, limiting the damage that his actions had done and attempting to keep his reputation clean. But he could not control the Lord of the Universe who sees everything, and he could not hide his sin or pretend that it never happened.

Conclusion

The first thing that this passage shows us is that no one is above sin. David wrote half of the Psalms, was a man after God’s own heart, and was an excellent military and political leader. He fell hard and took a lot of people down with him. No Christian is above falling into temptation. You don’t reach a certain age or stage where you’re completely immune to temptation. Do you dare boast or believe that you could never do the terrible things that David has done? I hope that you never do, but none of us should delude ourselves that we are incapable of them. Our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked. And none of us can hide what we do from the Lord, no matter how skilled we may be at deceiving others and ourselves. So David’s story is not one we can keep at arm’s length.

There are a lot of destructive things in this world, natural disasters, political and personal violence. But one disaster that we have the most control over is not committing adultery. Adultery makes a train wreck in our lives and our families. The world downplays this, many people see adultery as permissible, understandable, perhaps even noble. Someone screenshot two articles by the same author and posted them side-by-side online. The earlier article had the title, “Cheating on My Husband Made Me a Better Mother.” The later one (same author) was titled, “I Feel Inferior to My Son’s Friends’ Parents Because They’re Rich and Married and I’m Poor and Divorced.” Now, I don’t want to be too critical because I haven’t read the articles and I don’t know this person, but first you want us to think that you’re noble for cheating, then you want our pity because it’s left you poor and divorced. Hmmm...

In Ernest Hemingway’s novel *The Sun Also Rises*, a character is asked how he went bankrupt. He answers: “Two ways: gradually, then suddenly.” The same could be said for sexual sin: How did you fall into it? Gradually and then suddenly. The gradual part is when you allow thoughts and lusts in

your mind to play out; to indulge in pornography and imagine scenarios and excitements without attempting to reign in and get control of your thought life. Then suddenly a real-life opportunity affords itself, and you have gotten used to at least mentally giving in, and you find yourself where you never thought you'd be. All sin starts out as fun and exciting, but "it always leads to the same place: brokenness, agony, disappointment, and despair.... Sexual sin is so powerful, so destructive – and yet so easy to access – that it can bring the strongest believer to utter ruin."⁸ Some of the things that might have helped David and can help us in our desire to not fall into large sexual sins are:

- 1 - Recognize WHEN you are vulnerable. For David it was when he was alone and feeling content with life, with no battles to fight. For you and I it might be late at night, when you're tired, when you're discouraged, you're vulnerable to sin.
- 2 - Identify WHERE you are vulnerable. What sin areas do you struggle with? We know that David was already a multiple-woman man, that was a huge area of sin. Sexual sin might not tempt you, but alcoholism, anger, lying, other areas are ones that you need to be vigilant in.
- 3 - Listen to the people who warn you. David was told that this woman he desired was married to his friend and the daughter of another friend, and he ignored them. You need people in your life who will tell you the truth and keep you accountable, and you need to listen.
- 4 - Consider the consequences of sin beforehand. David ignored the fact that this woman was married and that this could all blow up in his face. We often have very short-term sight when we need long-term vision.
- 5 - Don't compound one sin with another. Obviously, David should have come clean and made things right with Uriah, rather than trying to cover up his sin. We can learn from his digging himself further into a hole and multiplying the sin – just repent, come clean, and make it right.

This story can give us the insight we need to escape and endure temptation if we will heed it - 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.*" Take God's way of escape and flee sin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a book about temptation, and in it he said:

"In our members there is a slumbering inclination toward desire, which is both sudden and fierce... It makes no difference whether it is a sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money... The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us... Therefore the Bible teaches us in times of temptation in the flesh, there is one command: Flee! Flee fornication. Flee idolatry. Flee youthful lusts. Flee the lust of the world. There is no resistance to Satan in lust other than flight. Every struggle against lust in one's own strength is doomed to failure."⁹

Look, I don't think that I can give you enough counsel and wisdom in a 35-40 minute sermon to equip you to never cheat on your spouse or fall hard in the area of sexuality. It's an area that has the potential to do unbelievable damage, but it's not the unforgiveable sin – I've known plenty of marriages that have survived an affair, but it's hard work. There are books with titles like *Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*; I counted a dozen of them on Amazon yesterday. If they help you, that's great. If you and your spouse need counseling, don't be too stubborn or ashamed to pursue it. Ultimately you need both people in the marriage to be absolutely committed to one another, and committed to doing the hard work at every stage of marriage to keep it growing and healthy. And we as believers have the greatest resources known to humanity: we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us and a Bible that reveals the will of God directly to us. James 1:12-13: "*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life,*

⁸ Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel* (Nashville: Holman, 2016), p. 213.

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Temptation* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 116-17.

which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." Then vv. 21 – "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." The Lord's will is that you find a husband or wife and that you covenant with them "til death do us part." You will need the Lord's strength to be faithful, to persevere, to forgive, and remain steadfast under trial and temptation.

I talked about the Davidic covenant last week. If you weren't there for it, that's OK, you don't need to understand everything about covenants to know this: over and over in the Old Testament, Israel was unfaithful to God and He then called out on it and punished them for it. He considered Israel His bride, and His bride committed adultery with other lovers; which is to say they worshipped false gods and aligned themselves with pagan nations instead of trusting in Yahweh. And He says things like Ezekiel 16:30 and 38: *"How sick is your heart, declares the Lord God, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute... And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy."* The book of Hosea is framed around a prophet who marries a woman who will commit infidelity on him, he knows that from the beginning. And he must buy her back because he is to show Israel a picture of how God loves, forgives, and redeems His people. And that's a picture of us as well: we sin constantly, we betray our Lord constantly, we run around to other lovers and commit spiritual adultery and infidelity. But God has made us His bride forever, and He will never leave nor forsake the ones that Jesus died for. Because we have been united with Christ through His death and His resurrection, we are eternally secure in His love. Let us live in that love and forgiveness, honoring God with our words, our actions, our marriages, and our lives. Amen.

Benediction

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 - *"For what we proclaim is not ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*