

SIN is...S.I.N.

2 Samuel 11:1–17, 26-27 ¹ In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. ² One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" ⁴ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵ The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." ⁶ So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰ When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" ¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" ¹² Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home. ¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵ In it he wrote, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." ¹⁶ So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. ¹⁷ When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. ²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

In Christ Jesus the Friend of sinners, dear fellow redeemed,

When Lifetouch was here last, the company that did our most recent pictorial directory, the photographer mentioned that they could touch-up my photo. "What do you mean by that?" I asked, rather intrigued? "Can you get rid of these bags beneath my eyes?" "Yes we can." I was assured. "And how about these wrinkles and my five o'clock shadow." "We can do all that, for a price." Suddenly my vanity was pitted against my pocketbook. I won't tell you which of the two won out. But I couldn't help thinking about this as I read through the words of our text. Here's why. When I came to the end of our account from 2 Samuel 11, I was reminded of something that Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector of England, supposedly said as he sat for his "official portrait." Tradition has it that he told the artist: "Be sure to paint me warts and all." I don't think there was any extra charge for a touch-up, but Cromwell wasn't having it. He wanted the painting to reflect who he really was.

That's what God does for us today in his Holy Word. He hands us a sketch from the life of his servant, David – and not a very flattering one. How easily God could have left this chapter out of the Scriptures. None of us would ever have needed to know this sad account from King David's life. But our Savior God paints David "warts and all." And he does so for you and me, that we

might learn a valuable lesson about ourselves and about the enemy within – our own sin. With this in mind, we will take as our simple theme: SIN is...S.I.N.

I suppose that sounds a bit simplistic, but for the benefit of our study, let's use this word S.I.N. as a learning aide so that we can better understand this enemy of ours on the basis of David's life. The first thing we'll note is this: Sin is...Seeking to ruin us, and it does this, not just when things are going badly for us, but when they are going very, very well.

Look at David. By God's grace, he's been a faithful follower of the true God all his life, putting his trust in God's promises, including the promise of a Savior to come, one from David's own line. God has blessed this man richly, making him king over Israel and giving him victory over all who opposed his kingdom. In fact as another battle season arrives, David's mighty army will be engaged in what might be considered a "mop-up" operation. Now understand in those times, a king's duty was to be on the front lines with his men and actually lead them into battle. But here we have the first indication that something's not right in David's thinking and life. **In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army...But David remained in Jerusalem.** (2 Samuel 11:1). Do you see it? At a time when all the kings were headed off to war, one stays home. David sends General Joab to do his work for him. That might seem like a minor point, but it sets up all that is to follow. You've heard it said: "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." Satan sees an opportunity in David's idleness: **One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her.** (2 Samuel 11:2).

It starts with a thought—the possibility of something new and exciting. And once that thought is born, it does not easily die, not for David. The information he seeks is supplied in the form of a question: **"Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"** (2 Samuel 11:3). The question begs one answer: "Of course, this is Uriah's wife. There's nothing for me here." But sin doesn't want to take "no" for an answer. **Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her.** (2 Samuel 11:4).

How could this be? It seems out of character for a man who spent his life drawing so much strength and comfort from the promises of God? But as you may have guessed, God doesn't share this news with us so that we can shake our heads in disgust. He means to warn us: If this can happen to my servant David, it could happen to you.

It's a sobering thought, isn't it? No matter how long we've been Christians, no matter how mature we've grown in the faith, we don't "outgrow" sin or its temptations—not on this side of heaven. There's not a time when Satan says, "I might as well give up on that one. He's too strong. She's too faithful." Just the opposite is true. In fact, the devil loves to play our strengths against us. How often it happens that we who think we are standing firm actually find in such thinking a license to sin? We permit ourselves a lustful stare or we harbor a spiteful thought, deciding that in the mind and hands of a lesser Christian this might be a problem, but not for us. God knows we've got this under control. He's not concerned, not about us because we'll know how and when to shut this down. We'll know to go this far and no further.

But don't you see? By this time we've crossed the line already. You heard what Jesus said in our gospel reading for today. Sin doesn't need to show itself in action in order to ruin us. Hell isn't just for murders. **"I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."** (Matthew 5:22). A wandering eye earns us the same fate which is why Jesus warns that it would be better to gouge it out and throw it away than to enter hell with our whole body intact.

Of course, Jesus isn't suggesting that we can somehow spare ourselves from sin's ruin by means of radical surgery. That's because the problem of sin goes far beyond skin and bone, as the Prophet Jeremiah points out when he writes: **The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.** (Jeremiah 17:9). The sinful heart cannot heal itself, no more than the sinner can save himself – a truth that brings us to the second point for our consideration today: Sin is...Incapable of cleaning

up its own mess. Sadly, this truth doesn't always keep us sinners from trying. As you know from the Scriptures, David's sin of adultery led to a pregnancy. He now comes to grips with the fact that what started out as a lustful thought may soon ruin his reputation in all of Israel. But instead of turning to God in repentance, the sinner begins to plot and plan ways to cover up his wrong. He'll bring Bathsheba's husband home from the front lines. While on leave, Uriah will sleep with his wife and as far as he and everyone else will know, the child conceived will be Uriah's. Problem solved.

Or was it? Unlike his king, Uriah wouldn't think of enjoying the comforts and pleasures of home life while his commander and compatriots were at war. Not even David's attempts to get Uriah drunk would change the soldier's mind about going home to Bathsheba. Sin's plan had failed completely. But still sin does not give up. It doubles down. There's another way. With Uriah out of the picture, David could claim Bathsheba as his own. It wasn't what David wanted, but Uriah had left him no choice. David would enlist the help of his general and together they would conspire to have Uriah ambushed and killed. What began on the palace rooftop as a sinful craving has led David to the greatest depths of depravity, as seen in the fact that he chooses to deliver Uriah's death sentence with a note he has placed in Uriah's own hand.

If all this were some drama playing out on the big screen, you'd count on the writer to foil the murderous plot and save the hero. But in real life, no such thing happened. This time sin's plan worked perfectly. Uriah and a number of his fellow soldiers were murdered by their king—all in an attempt to clean up sin's mess. In fact, David is actually cast in the role of hero, in the eyes of his countryman at least, as he makes the widow of this slain soldier his own wife so that he can care for her in her time of grief. The sinner and his sin seem to fool everyone, with one great exception: **...the thing David had done displeased the Lord. (2 Samuel 11:27).**

The names may change, yours and mine among them, but sin works the same in all of us. Its temptation draws us in with the promise of satisfaction, pleasure or vengeance. But then, without fail, it can't deliver. Instead it makes everything worse. But rather than turn from it, we so often turn to it for help like fools who have no clue they're being duped. How many times have our sinful thoughts given birth to sinful words and actions? How many lies have we told to try to hide, or justify or excuse this sin we spoke or did? How many people have we dragged into our sinful messes as accomplices, taking them down with us? How many souls have we trampled on and left broken in our sin's wake?

Here the hardened sinner might object, insisting that his sin has hurt no one at all. But there's no such thing as a victimless sin. For, even if he doesn't realize it, the sinner himself becomes the victim of a ruined relationship with God. For like David, our sin always displeases the Lord, and our sin always separates us from him. No one learned this lesson better than David himself. Listen to what he'd later write: **"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." (Psalm 32:3-4).** David wasn't getting away with anything. He was sin-sick. Israel's shepherd king had become a lost sheep, unable to find his way back to God. So God came looking for David. God sent Nathan to tell the king a story about two men – one rich the other poor. The rich man had a large number of sheep and cattle. The poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and cared for. It was like a daughter to him. But when a traveler came to the rich man, instead of preparing one of his own sheep or cattle to serve as a meal for his guest, he took the ewe lamb that had belonged to the poor man. When David heard this, his anger burned. He said to Nathan: **"As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" (2 Samuel 12:5).** Then Nathan said to David: **"You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7).** Those few words brought David to his knees in repentance. **"I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Samuel 12:13).** And then, Nathan spoke the most powerful words any sinner could hope to hear: **"The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die." (2 Samuel 12:13).**

Dear friend, these words are spoken to you this day. They come directly from the heart and the mouth of your God. The one who sent Nathan to David, sent the Good Shepherd for you. Jesus

took your sin, your guilt and all you've done to try to hide it, he took it all to the cross. He was cut off from God in hell so that you might live in heaven forever. This is why God's tells David's story, warts and all. He wants you to know that SIN is Nothing he can't forgive.

What a life-changing message. No matter what we've done, no matter what we've been, this is a new day of grace and we who live in it are God's new creation in Christ. Here's why. God covers every blemish of our sin, not with the stroke of a brush or the magic of computer software, but with the blood of his Son. God removes sin's every wart and wrinkle of our sin and replaces it with the righteousness that Jesus earned for us and freely credits to us. How grateful we can be to God who takes away our sin. How relieved we are to learn that whenever sin is crouching at our door, waiting to tempt us, we can turn to our God and his Word for safety and protection. And how blessed we are to have this day of grace to show our thanks by seeking the pardon of those we've hurt and by forgiving those who have hurt us.

So ends the lesson of David. Simple? Yes, but so important: SIN is Seeking to ruin us, is Incapable of cleaning up its own mess, but most important, Sin is Nothing that God can't forgive, for Jesus' sake. Amen.