

The Man After God's Own Heart

“... Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Samuel 24:14).

Our thoughts this morning concern sin. The present is the dispensation of sin. Anything contrary to God's will, or out of harmony with His perfect holiness and purity, is sin.

We are here this morning because of sin. The love and sacrifice we commemorate was because of sin: the great sin offering—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

We have read together 2 Samuel 24. It tells us of David's sin in numbering Israel. Why was it sin to take a census? Because it was of the flesh, and contrary to the will of God. Inevitably our minds turn to that more dreadful sin that cast a great shadow over David's life and posterity.

“God moved David to number Israel” (24:1).

There is much to be learned from this. God did not tempt David, or move him against his own inclination. How then did He “move” him to do what otherwise he probably would not have done?

Here lies the deep lesson. If we toy with sin, if we allow our minds to dwell on the desire for that which is sinful, then God may contrive that we find it impossible to scramble back to safety. God is not mocked. He knows the hearts, and He typically causes the sinner to punish himself in an appropriate way.

If we choose evil, God can, and well may, blind and confuse us that we go deeper and deeper into evil, for our own fitting punishment and training, as when Israel lusted for flesh and God gave them flesh till it nauseated them and caused a plague and thousands died. And the name of that place was called the Graves of Lust.

This is doubtless the explanation of many of the apparently inexplicable and stupid sins that men stumble into to their own distress and often destruction.

There is no more fitting punishment than to be forced to accept in full and sickening overabundance that which we just planned to dabble lightly with and then pull back.

How often children think they are deceiving us by their all too transparent little subterfuges that countless children have tried countless times before. And we think we can do the same to God! *“As a man sows, so shall he reap”* is the inexorable decree of omniscience and omnipotence. If only we had the plain, simple common sense to *really* believe it—

“As a man sows, so shall he reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Every single act comes back for good or ill, whatever it may be.

If we have any part in God's purpose at all, then whatever we do wrong be it large or small, we shall pay for it in some very unpleasant and appropriate way—usually, as we see in the case of David, in the way that hurts us most, and that mocks us with our sin.

If we are fortunate, and if God has patience, and sees something in us worth working with, the punishment will be in this life, like David's. If we appear to escape punishment in this life, then woe betide us indeed—it is reserved for the judgment seat of Christ.

It is beautifully appropriate, and fully in harmony with the deep wisdom of the ways of God, that this sin is made the foundation of future blessing and is turned into a stepping-stone in the purpose of God.

The scene of plague and death in God's marvellous transmutation becomes the scene of forgiveness and mercy. The plague was halted when the avenging angel was at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David, in thanksgiving, and for an atoning sacrifice of reconciliation, bought the burnt offering and God answered by fire from heaven, and the plague was stayed.

This, by divine providence, happened to be on Mt. Moriah where Abraham had offered Isaac, where the Temple was later built, and finally where the one great sacrificial offering for all time for the raging plague of sin and death was made in the fullness of the appointed time of God's wisdom and purpose, when the avenging Death-Angel's hand was turned back, on behalf of all mankind.

David said on this occasion—

"This is the House of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel"
(1 Chronicles 22:1).

And consequently we read—

"Then Solomon began to build the House of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mt. Moriah . . . in the place David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chronicles 3:1).

—same pattern—divine good out of evil in David's other and greater sin—but at terrible cost in suffering and sorrow.

The usual, natural reaction to David's great sin is that we "just cannot understand how David could do such a thing." Whenever there is anything in Scripture that we "cannot understand," it should flash a warning—*Why* cannot we understand? Where have we failed in preparing ourselves to understand? Are we unconsciously assuming that we are able to understand everything that is understandable?

Paul told the Hebrew and Corinthian brethren and sisters that there were marvels and glories and beauties and mysteries of God and the Scriptures that he longed to impart to them for their joy and up-building, and their deeper, richer communion together, but they were utterly incapable of comprehending them.

Because of spiritual slothfulness they were dull of understanding. They were mentally retarded in spiritual things. And it was not their misfortune it was their fault, because they had not *applied* themselves to spiritual growth.

Our natural reaction that we "just cannot understand how David could do such a thing" should open our eyes to many things. It should show us that we have much to learn.

If we understand sin and human nature as God understands it, we could clearly understand all instances of sin. When we say we "cannot understand" how David could do what he did, we are unconsciously setting ourselves—our capacity of discernment—as the standard, as if our minds were the ultimate in judgment. We do this in many things. God tells us that there are far higher mental powers than ours.

We must realise that there are very real limits to our physical capacity to understand. We cannot understand how time has no beginning, or space has no end. We have not been given that kind of understanding capacity, no matter how we develop. We have been given sufficient mental capacity to run the race of life successfully, if we follow the rules. That's all we need.

But should our incapacity to comprehend the marvels of beginningless and endless time deter us from the obviously practical wisdom of extracting every drop of value from every moment of time as it so quickly runs through our fingers?

“We just cannot understand how David could do that!” This is usually a moral judgment also. Translated into what we mean, we are saying: “*I could never do such a thing! It is unthinkable!*” This is what Peter said: “*I could never deny thee!*”

We loudly proclaim our pious shock. That’s just a back-handed way of giving ourselves a boost. It’s unconscious self-glorification.

Perhaps it would be more profitable to turn the light inward upon ourselves: Why cannot we understand how human beings can grievously stumble? Are *we* so perfect?

We should have *no difficulty* in understanding how any sin or weakness could occur, except for constant vigilance and prayer. Our difficulty—our marvel—should be to understand the greatness of God’s mercy and patience and love toward constantly erring man.

The more we understand why the mighty Elijah should flee for his life; why the great John the Baptist should question and doubt: why James and John should seek pre-eminence: why Peter should curse, and swear and deny?

We must look upon David’s great sin—as upon the trials of Job and indeed as upon all the sufferings of Christ—as the necessary fire of affliction to develop them to the highest beauty and desirability in God’s sight.

We cannot begin to compare ourselves with Job and David—these men were rare giants in the eternal purpose of God—but in our small way we can learn from their experiences the basic lessons of godliness. Job, when his trial was over, said: “*I abhor myself in dust and ashes.*” So did David.

Sin permeates the constitution of all mankind. It must be burnt out by suffering, and the greater the man, the greater the necessary suffering—and the greater the resultant beauty of the vessel prepared for God.

David’s great sin, and also his lesser ones, were necessary to his development. He had weaknesses to overcome by bitter experience. He had to be tried to the utmost to learn his own weaknesses, and sin’s mighty power and terrible evil.

He had to be taught, by the bitterest experiences, that man—however noble, however capable, however devoted to God, however blessed and used in the purpose of God—is still a very weak, flimsy, erring, precarious creature of flesh, laden with the latent leprosy of sin.

To him was the great promise that the Saviour of mankind should come from his loins, and be known for eternity as *his* son. And looking back at his incredible record of faith and courage and suffering and patience and kindness to his enemies, and tremendous accomplishments for God of war and government and music and praise, he could almost be entitled to feel that he had earned his high distinction in the purpose of God.

And in a limited sense, in a relative, comparative sense, he had. He alone, a boy, had stood in perfect faith, when all Israel’s mighty men had cowered before the huge man of flesh. And from that point on he had served God with preeminent distinction, and had been made the medium of the Spirit’s deepest and most beautiful songs of praise and holiness.

But he must learn to the fullest and bitterest depths the natural depravity of the human heart, and the great need for that Saviour who, by the grace of God was to come through him—not only to eternally establish his (David’s) kingdom, but to conquer and destroy his sin, and the sin that lies at the root of all mankind’s sorrow and suffering and evil.

David was not *caused* to sin—either in the numbering or in the case of Bathsheba. But he was *permitted* to sin. He was put in a position where his weakness would be exposed and tested. God could have sent an Abigail to stop him, if He had so chosen. But *this* time he was allowed to fall.

Comparing himself with all around him—his faith, his accomplishments, his sufferings, his fortitude and obedience under the extremities of totally unjust persecution by the king and people he served, then his great public honour and recognition by God—he could well feel natural confidence, even complacency. He could easily be tempted to relax his guard against the subtle deceptiveness of sin.

A balance was needed. A thorn in the flesh. Something to ever remind him of the pitiful weakness and insecurity of the best and strongest of human nature.

The sin changed the whole course and pattern of David's subsequent life, both internally within himself and externally in his experiences and circumstances—

"My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3).

"The sword shall never depart from thine house" (2 Samuel 12:10).

The point is not, how could such a man do such a thing? The point is: *If* such a man *could* do such a thing, how vigilant must *we* be to constantly strengthen our defences against the deceptiveness of sin. Jesus said to Peter—

"Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation" (Matthew 26:40)—

and Jesus himself, strong as he was, constantly followed this course. But Peter did not see the urgent need. He overestimated himself. "I could never do that!" David may have done the same.

Contemplation of the sin of David should carry us deeper and deeper into a comprehension of the hopeless sinfulness of all mankind and the wonderful wisdom and love of God in the plan of redemption whereby man is, all at the same time, purified, humbled, glorified, and filled with the effulgence of thanksgiving and reciprocal love. That love is in proportion to our recognition of forgiveness—

"He to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much" (Luke 7:42-43).

We shall then more and more understand how it could happen to such a man, and we shall feel a deep fellow feeling with him in it all, and we shall be increasingly kind and compassionate and understanding to the sins and failures and weaknesses of all.

We shall not increase our tolerance toward sin. Much, much the reverse. We shall more and more realise its terrible, destructive evil; we shall recognise it more and more as the great common, implacable enemy of us all, and shall perceive that if a man is sincerely struggling against it, only God can judge the seriousness of his failures, and the extent of his successes, and the more concerned and anxious we shall be, by prayer and study, to fortify *ourselves* against sin—

"Watch and pray, lest YE enter into temptation" (Mark 14:38).

We say this was a terrible sin—a major sin. When is a sin large or small? Who is to say? Any sin is sin. Any conscious, deliberate sin, even the most trivial is a complete break in our lifeline of love that unites us to God.

The depth of sin is no direct measure of the heart, or of a man's relative wickedness. A small, mean sin, done consciously and deliberately, and brushed off with a belittling of its seriousness, and excuses, and self-justification, when pointed out, can reveal a far more sordid and poverty-stricken state of heart than a great failure—stumbled into, or committed under pressure—that is sincerely and bitterly and openly repented of.

We cannot judge degrees of guilt, or magnitude of sin. We do not know how severely God is testing a man, or what great work God is preparing him for.

We can, and must, determine between factual right and wrong, and we must follow the scripturally required course in relation to it. But we cannot judge, we cannot condemn, we cannot discern motives or relative degrees of guilt. That is God's prerogative.

It is quite likely, and far more in keeping with his character, that David had no intent of going as far as adultery when he first sent for Bathsheba to visit him. The deadly downward course had begun, and God was watching and controlling, but David, presuming on his own strength and goodness, *may* have intended to go only so far.

There is much greater pertinence and significance in the lesson for us if it were a matter of presumption on his strength, and a foolish playing with fire, rather than the deliberate premeditated commission of a vile sin.

Surely few—if any—claiming to be Christ's brethren would deliberately set out to commit a deadly sin. But *any* could very easily be trapped in a self-made net that began with a very small act of folly.

David doubtless repented, or thought he repented, of the adultery into which he had stumbled, but it is a self-justifying concept of the sordid sequence of events that followed, as he struggled to break out of the net that was tightening on him.

David's whole motive in the subsequent terrible chain of events *may* have sincerely been to save Bathsheba from shame and Uriah from sorrow—or he may have convinced himself that was his motive.

Or David may have, in his heart, excused himself by blaming Bathsheba, as Adam blamed Eve, and it is quite conceivable that in the development of the events, there was some degree of justification for him so doing, though we have no specific reason to assume so. Clearly the *responsibility* was David's. He was the one exclusively called to account and judged.

David was not a deliberate hypocrite. This is the least possible thing we could believe. Somehow he was able to square his conscience. He had to have some way of living with himself for that long, dark year before he was exposed. It may have been a combination of self-deception on his part with judicial blinding on God's part, and the more time passed without anything terrible happening, or any condemnation from God, the more his conscience would be lulled, and his self-justification confirmed. But the day of account, though long delayed came unerringly at last, just as it always does and always will.

Whenever we consider David's sin, we must keep the whole picture of his life in true balance and perspective. It is a glorious picture of a "*man after God's own heart*."

David was a giant: one of the few really great men of all history. He was great in both strength and in sweetness: in physical courage, and in spiritual discernment, poetry, music and psalms.

David is the Psalms, and the Psalms are David. Truly they are prophetically and inspirationally the mind of the Spirit of Christ, but David's own heart and mind were the Spirit's chosen medium of their expression.

David is pre-eminently the "*sweet psalmist of Israel*"—Israel both natural and spiritual. Clearly the great love and ambition of David's life was the pure service and worship of God in Israel.

He found that worship broken down, scattered, almost non-existent: the neglected Tabernacle in one place, the forgotten Ark in another.

He left it firmly re-established and thoroughly arranged in careful, organised depth and detail: with a numerous and orderly course of priests, singers and Levites, the Ark brought to Jerusalem, a

magnificent Temple completely planned and designed, and a vast wealth of materials for it assembled. It would have been built if God had permitted him.

The spirit of David was the spirit of song: of praise, worship, thanksgiving, supplication, prayer, adoration. This was his greatest gift to his own generation and to all subsequent generations of the sons of God.

The Psalms of David have been the cherished hymnal of God's people from that day to this, for three thousand years, and they will doubtless accompany them into the endless future.

They express all the joys and sufferings, hopes, and fears, praises and supplications of the children of God of all time.

The Psalms would lose much beauty and power and value for us without the deep spirit of repentance and supplications, and joy in forgiveness and reconciliation that David's bitter experiences added to them.

David gave life and power to the worship of God in Israel by giving it song. He gave Israel all the necessary exterior frame work for faithfulness and inspiration and unity and holiness.

We cannot help but think of bro. Roberts' similar vast labours and accomplishments for the people of God in these last days. The preparation of our hymn book, containing fifty of the Psalms, is one of the most powerful works bro. Roberts did for the Truth and the Brotherhood.

The national provision David set up, the Temple and the worship and the service, failed for the majority, and failed soon and miserably, but this has not lessened its value and power for the remnant of grace that has always existed through the ages.

In the providence of God, no one can take from His children the great treasure of the Psalms of David.

If we would understand the sad sins of David, their bitter consequences and their glorious aftermath; if we would truly learn their deep lessons, let us read and read and reread the Psalms. We have no right to attempt any conclusions concerning David without taking his Psalms fully into account. Here he states his case and bares his heart in terms that should put us all to shame. Let us get the spirit of David, which is the spirit of Christ—

“My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:2).

“My soul thirstiest for Thee: my flesh longeth for Thee” (Psalm 63:1).

“One thing have I desired, that I may behold the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4).

David's sin manifests the wise and loving working of God—both in punishment and in mercy. For His people, God always combines punishment with hope and reconciliation. God loved Solomon. God called him Jedidiah, “*Beloved of Yahweh*”—same root as David, “*Beloved*.” Why did God make choice of Solomon for the direct line of Christ, for all succeeding generations to marvel at?

We would think it much more in keeping with the principles of holiness to carefully avoid any connection with this questionable union, rooted in sin and lust, and stained with adultery and murder, and rather, to choose the heir for the direct line of Christ from one of David's legitimate and faithfully-acquired wives.

Certainly God had a deep purpose and lesson for us in it. And certainly it was not to condone or belittle the dreadfulness of David's sin. Perhaps it was another beautiful illustration of the divine principle that if there is true repentance, God will bring good out of evil, after there has been appropriate punishment, faithfully submitted to. When God must punish heavily He compensates.

Contrast the two children of David and Bathsheba, the first manifested His wrath. It must die, because of David's sin.

But Solomon it is especially recorded that God loved, and personally named him to commemorate that love—Jedidiah.

Would it not be to show the fullness of God's forgiveness—the fullness of the restored communion and fellowship? The fellowship of God was the most important thing in the world to David. It was life itself.

“There is none upon earth that I desire before Thee” (Psalm 73:25).

The especial choice and favouring of Solomon would be a gracious and greatly needed gesture of love from God that reconciliation was complete.

As the wise woman of Tekoah said to David, in words that—like those of Caiaphas—go far beyond the meaning and understanding of the original speaker—even to encompass the whole sweep of God's purpose.

“Neither doth God respect any person yet doth He devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him” (2 Samuel 14:14).

God hath, in His love, devised the means, and we meet this morning in commemoration of it. Let us ever thank Him for it—thank Him with the offering He asks—a living sacrifice.

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