

## **My Sin Is Ever Before Me**

### **The Failures and Successes of the Man After God's Own Heart**

*"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice"—Psalm 51:2-8*

OUR thoughts this morning concern sin. The present is a dispensation of sin. Anything contrary to God's will, or anything 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 Sam. 24. It tells us of David's sin in numbering Israel. Why was it sin just to take a census? Because it was of the flesh and contrary to the will of God.

"God moved David to number Israel" (v. 1).

There is much to be learned from this. God did not *tempt* David, nor move him against his own inclination. How then did He 'move' him to do what otherwise he possibly 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 judicially contrive that our footing may give way, and we may 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.

If we choose evil, even in a small degree, God can and well may blind and confuse us that we go deeper and deeper into the evil, for our own fitting punishment and training, as when Israel lusted for flesh, and God gave them flesh until it nauseated them and caused a plague, and 1000s died, and the 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. There is no more fitting punishment than to be forced to accept in full and sickening abundance that which we planned to just dabble lightly with, and then pull back—

"As a man sows, so shall he reap."

If only we had the plain, simple common-sense to really *believe* it!

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

Joab was very strongly against the numbering. This was one time where, strangely, the fleshly Joab was right, and the godly David was wrong. We can at times learn wisdom from anyone, however more spiritually-minded than they we think ourselves to be. The practical Joab could see no sense in sinning *unnecessarily*, with no gain from it.

The result was the most destructive plague ever visited on Israel: 70,000 died. But 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 eternal purpose of God.

The scene of the plague, 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, about to destroy the city. David, in thanksgiving and for an atoning sacrifice of reconciliation, bought the threshing-floor, built an altar, and offered a burnt offering. And God answered by fire from heaven, and the plague was stayed.

This, by all-foreseeing divine providence, happened to be on Mt. Moriah, where Abraham had typically offered his only son, where the Temple was later built, and finally where the one great sacrificial offering for all time was made, that was to halt the raging plague of sin and death, and deliver the Holy City. In the fulness of the appointed time of God's wisdom and purpose, 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 Chron. 22:1).

And consequently we read (2 Chron. 3:1)—

"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 Oman the Jebusite."

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David was a "man after God's Own heart"—a major element of His eternal purpose. Therefore we see the same merciful pattern—divine good out of human 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 with Bathsheba is that we "just cannot understand how David could do such a thing." Whenever there is anything in Scripture we "cannot understand," it should flash a warning: why cannot we understand? Wherein have we failed in preparing ourselves to understand? Let us in humility examine ourselves and confess our fleshly inadequacies, and not unconsciously assume that our natural capacity to understand is the ultimate standard of judgment.

Paul bluntly 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 upbuilding, and their deeper and richer communion together—but that they were utterly incapable of comprehending them. Because of lazy spiritual slothfulness, they were dull of understanding; they were mentally retarded in spiritual things—1 Cor. 3: 1-3; Heb. 7:11-14.

When they, thru ample opportunity, should have been teaching these deep things to others, they were—because of sloth & negligence needing to be retaught the first principles themselves. Instead of giving their whole life and energy to divine things as commanded, they gave them to present things; saying of the wonders of God's Word: "It is too deep for us" (meaning, rather, "We are too shallow for it.")

Our natural shallow 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*, and perhaps vital to our salvation. If we understood sin and human nature as God understands it, we could clearly understand all instances of sin, and we would be wiser and sadder men.

"We just cannot understand how David could do that!" This is usually a *moral judgment*, also. Translated into what we really 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, which is just a backhanded way of giving ourselves a lift in self-esteem. It's unconscious self-glorification.

Perhaps it would be more profitable to turn the light inward on ourselves: *why* cannot we "understand" how poor weak human beings can grievously stumble? Are *we* so perfect? Our difficulty—our marvel—should be to understand the greatness of God's mercy and patience and love toward constantly-erring man.

But our unconsciously self-satisfied inability to understand the great sin of David—while partly due doubtless to the physical limits of our basic understanding capacity—is principally due to our need for learning and instruction from the Word of God. The more we understand the Word, its message of sin and righteousness, of death & life, then the more our shallow "cannot understand" will change from self-congratulation to a humble, sympathetic fellowship with David in his weakness.

Can we understand why the mighty, fearless Elijah should suddenly flee for his life? Why the great John the Baptist should question and doubt? Why James and John should seek the pre-eminence? And 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 in God's sight.

We cannot begin to compare ourselves with Job and David—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 required suffering—and the greater the resultant beauty of the vessel 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 the mighty power and terrible evil of sin. 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 his tremendous accomplishments for God in war and government and music and praise, he could almost be entitled to feel that he had *earned* this 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 and trembled before the huge man of the flesh. And from that point on he had served God with unswerving devotion and 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 and deceptiveness of the human heart, and the great need for that Saviour who, by the grace of God, was to come thru 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 again 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 had selflessly served; and then his great public honour and recognition by God—he could well feel natural confidence, even complacency, as he settled into his later years: could easily be tempted to relax his guard against the untiring assaults and 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. This 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 . . . The sword shall never depart from thine house."*

For the eternal future, this bitter experience of failure was a vital stepping stone to greater perfection of character. For the present, it was the end of all joy and comfort and satisfaction in natural things:

*"The sword shall never depart": Tamar, Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah: on & on & on.*

David's sins tied his hands in dealing with the sins of others, as he had responsibility to do. This is one of sin's worst aspects: it is self-breeding. It hurts others in a continuing chain. He could not deal properly with Amnon, or Absalom, or Shimei, or Joab. How could he punish his sons for what he knew were judgments on his own sin?

David's secret sin is recorded in full sordid detail for all future generations of sinners to leer and mock at. It was necessary in God's purpose and wisdom that it be so. The great men of God in Scripture lived out for us the realities of life, in both strengths and weaknesses. And all is recorded without concealment or modification, that we may be inspired by the strengths and warned by the weaknesses.

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." —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 David's sin 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—

"To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much" (Luke 7:47).

Then we shall 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 the reverse. We shall more and more realize its terrible, destructive evil power; we shall recognize it more and more as the great, common, implacable enemy of us all. And we shall perceive that if a man is sincerely struggling against it, only God can judge the seriousness of his failures, and the victory of his successes. And the more concerned and anxious we shall be, by prayer and study, to fortify ourselves—

*"Watch and pray, lest YE enter into temptation."*

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, and upon which everything depends.

The magnitude of a 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 with excuses and self-justification when pointed out—can reveal a far more sordid and poverty-stricken state of heart than a great failure that is sincerely and bitterly and openly repented of.

We cannot judge degrees of guilt, or magnitudes 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 or 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 intention 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 of foolish playing with fire, rather than the cold, deliberate, premeditated commission of a vile and despicable 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 clear that he must have had a completely perverted and self-justifying, concept of the sordid sequence of events that followed, as he struggled to break out of the net that was gradually tightening upon 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 he 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 justification for him so doing, tho we have no 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. Here is the deceitfulness of sin. 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, tho long delayed, came inexorably at last, just as it always does, and always will.

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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." Habitual uprightness, service, zeal, faith: occasional failings: intense repentance. His subjection to temptation gives more meaning to his tremendous record of faith, for he was a weak mortal man, just like us.

Patently he submitted for weary years to Saul's wicked and ungrateful persecution. He never fought back. He always left the issue in God's hands, content to wait God's good time. God had appointed Saul, and he was the "Lord's anointed." Even in the extremity of self-defence against murderous persecution, he would not harm him.

In assessing David's life, let us try to picture and realize the perils and hardships he endured. During his 20's, when he was hardly yet a man, he was hunted and chased like a criminal from place to place for a period of several years, never knowing where to go or whom to trust, with wives and children to care for, and 600 very difficult and quarrelsome men, with their families, to provide for.

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

David is The Psalms, and The Psalms are David. David was privileged to write the songs of praise for the people of God for the whole 3000 year period from his day to the establishment of the Kingdom, and doubtless for the endless ages beyond. Truly the Psalms are prophetically and inspirationally the mind of the Spirit of Christ, but David's own heart and mind were the Spirit's chosen medium.

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

He left it firmly established and thoroughly arranged in careful, organized depth and detail: with a numerous and orderly course of priests, singers and Levites; the Ark brought lovingly to a place of honour at Jerusalem; a magnificent Temple completely planned and designed; and a vast wealth of materials for it assembled. And it would have been built too, if God had permitted him.

The spirit of David was the spirit of song: of praise, worship, supplication, prayer, thanksgiving, 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 ever been the cherished Hymnal of God's people. 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 supplication, 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 framework 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, now all but forgotten in many quarters. And the preparation of our Hymn Book, containing 50 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 splendid Temple and the impressive worship and 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 thru the ages. In the providence of God, no one can take from His children the priceless 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 for sinners everywhere—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—

*"O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (119:97).*

*"My heart and my flesh cry out for the Living God" (84:2).*

*"My soul thirsteth for Thee: my flesh longeth for Thee" (63:1).*

*"All my desire is before Thee" (38:9).*

*"My soul fainteth for the courts of the Lord" (84:2)*

*"My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto Thy judgments" (119:20).*

*"One thing have I desired: that I may behold the beauty of the Lord" (27:4).*

*"With my whole heart have I sought Thee" (119:10).*

David's sin manifests the wise and loving working of God—both in the punishment and in the mercy. For His people, God has always combined punishment with hope and reconciliation.

God loved Solomon, and called him Jedidiah, *Beloved of Yahweh*, from the same root as David, *Beloved*. Why, of all David's sons, did God specially choose and love Solomon, son of Bathsheba, apparently the first surviving child of this sin-founded union—choose him for the throne of Israel, as the great royal type of Christ and his Kingdom, and first link in the royal chain to Christ?

We would think it much more in keeping with the principles of holiness to carefully avoid any connection with—and seeming approval of—this questionable union, rooted in sin and lust, and stained with adultery and murder; and rather choose the next king and subsequent lineage from one of David's legitimate and faithfully-acquired wives. Certainly God had a deep purpose and lesson in this for us. And certainly it was not to condone or belittle the dreadfulness of David's sin, which God terribly condemned and terribly punished.

Perhaps it was another beautiful illustration of the divine principle that if there is true repentance, God will bring good out of the evil, after there has been appropriate punishment, *humbly and faithfully submitted to*. When God must punish heavily, He compensates.

Contrast these 2 children of 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. Would it not be to show the fulness of God's forgiveness—the fulness 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 on earth I desire before Thee."

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

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

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