

“The Grace of Not Getting Away With It”
by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)
Continuing a series *A King for God’s People*

2nd Samuel 12:1-14,24-25

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See the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Have no doubt. David was getting away with it.

Oh, it wasn’t such a big secret. Conspiracies of silence are not small huddles keeping things hush-hush. No, a conspiracy of silence is when lots of folk know, but no one will talk about it.¹

Taking Bathsheba and murdering Uriah was not a one-man operation. David needed the connivance of palace officials, senior army officers and so on. Few knew the whole story, but they knew enough. . . .

. . . and knew that David would get away with it. There would be no royal commission David was the royal! No journalist would dig deep. David was popular! He was the hero! His approval ratings were setting records! He had done good! Without him, where would they be? They needed David.

They say history gets written by the winners.² David was the winner! So he’d get away with it. End of story.

But God is writing a different story.

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Nathan is David’s special advisor. God sends him to confront the king about his criminal behaviour. God sends him to end the conspiracy of silence, and pull away the cover-up. How will David respond? He has shown he has no problem using violence. Nathan must be very careful.³

So Nathan tells a story. He brings a case before the court where the king is the judge.

One fellow had everything. He was rich, a mover-and-shaker, something of a local

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_of_silence_\(expression\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_of_silence_(expression))

² Though widely attributed to Winston Churchill, the origin of this bit of popular wisdom is unknown.

³ “The narrative struggles with how truth shall speak to power. The prophet addresses the king. Such speech is dangerous business, especially to address a king so cynical and desperate. The parable is the right strategy, for it permits the king to draw his own unavoidable conclusion.” Walter Brueggemann, First and Second Samuel (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 280.

bigwig, one of the important people. He needed to impress a guest with a fancy dinner. He could easily have covered the cost from his own barnyard. Instead, he ordered take-out . . . he took-out a lamb from his neighbour's house.

That neighbour was poor. He had nothing. Just that one lamb. She was precious to him, a pet, part of the family. Until the rich neighbour took her home for dinner.

That's the case, my lord. What's your verd. . . .

David jumps in before Nathan can finish. He is outraged. He is right.

Have you ever seen such selfishness, greed, abuse and destruction?⁴

(I wonder if Nathan nods.)

Death for him!

(David pauses, takes a breath and reconsiders; capital punishment is for the most serious crimes, like murder.)

He must pay back four times the value of the lamb.⁵ He acted without compassion.

See how Nathan baits the hook? He uses David's sense as a judge. And his wisdom. And his compassion. Nathan baits it, throws it in, and David bites down hard.

III

Then, Nathan gives the line a jerk and sets the hook in place.

David, you are the man!

You are the sheep-stealer, the lamb-devourer, the life-breaker.

Your majesty, God has given you everything. God says, "I have given you power." God says, "I made you king; don't think you climbed to the crown on your own." God says, "I took the power away from the old king Saul, and gave it to you. And I've always been ready to give you more."

Yet this is what you do. This is the evil you do.

"God says, "You have many wives, David." (That's what kings did, and not just because they could. Political alliances were forged by marrying into other royal families. So

⁴ "This is a tale of cynicism, selfishness, destruction, and greed." Brueggemann, 280.

⁵ See the punishment prescribed in Exodus 22:1.

“many wives” is about power.⁶) *“You have many wives. Uriah had but one, his dear Bathsheba. But you took her from him, as surely as that man took the other’s lamb. Worse, you then murdered your neighbour, your loyal servant who was fighting your battles for you . . . you had Uriah murdered to cover your crime.”*

David is caught. He has already judged himself guilty; he just didn’t know it until that moment. Jesus said, *“In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*⁷ David judged the actions of the man who stole the lamb, and found him guilty. Nathan takes the same standard, holds it up for David to see . . .

IV

. . . and David is crushed by his own verdict.

I wonder. Until that moment, had David seen the wrong of what he had done? I know. He took Bathsheba (and I don’t think she could give meaningful consent). He committed adultery. He had Uriah murdered. Isn’t the wrong obvious?

Except, I know my own ability to delude myself, to convince myself, to close my eyes to myself, to excuse myself. Who likes to see the truth of what we have done? We personally, families, the church, our country? Who wants to admit we’ve harmed, we’ve inflicted pain, we’ve sinned? The smells of our own lies are so much sweeter than the stench they cover.

Having more power than most of us, David could inflict more harm, more pain, more damage. But in guilt and responsibility . . . David represents us. God made David the King of God’s People to be their representative. And God created and chose Israel to represent us all. Our better, and our worse.

What he did to Bathsheba and to Uriah shatters any illusions we had of David’s innocence. The golden boy proved to be tarnished under the shine. And in David, we see ourselves.

God will not let David get away with it.

That is good news.

V

It is good news, because by judging David . . . by judging us, God gives hope for our future.

We think about God’s judgement, and we usually imagine questions like “Who’s in?” and “Who’s out?” Or, “Who’s good?” and “Who’s bad?” We think of judgment as a bad thing,

⁶ About verse 8, and all of chapter 12, V. Philips Long writes that it “should be read in the context of power—its use and abuse—and not as a comment on the (im)propriety of polygamy.” See John H. Walton (ed), Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 460.

⁷ Matthew 7:2 (NIV)

the stern verdict of “scary God!”

But listen to Scot McKnight’s description; it’s closer to the mark. “*Judgment in Israel’s story is about God stepping in to end what is wrong and to establish what is right in the world.*”⁸

Ending what is wrong. . . . Establishing what is right. . . . Doesn’t that sound good?

Everything God does is good. Everything God does is from love. That includes not letting us get away with it.

During Maggie’s baptism, I asked “*Will you turn to Jesus, crucified and risen, our Judge and our Hope? . . .*” Without God’s judgment, David and we who are like David might get away with it. Then there will be no hope for Bathsheba, Uriah, or David, or any of us.

Jump ahead in the story. After their child dies, David and Bathsheba have another.⁹ They name him “Solomon” which sounds something like the Hebrew word for “replacement.” It also sounds like the word for peace, “shalom.”¹⁰ Is this their prayer? That through their child Solomon, shalom—reconciliation, completeness, wellness and prosperity— will live again in their family and in their people?¹¹

God then gives the child another name: Jedidiah (or Yedideyah). That means, “Beloved of the Lord.”¹²

That’s what God calls us: beloved. That is God’s promise to us: beloved.

God won’t let us get away with it, because God is making something new for God’s beloved.

Amen.

⁸ Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014), 183.

⁹ 2nd Samuel 12:24-25.

¹⁰ See Walton, 461.

¹¹ “In the biblical tradition, justice is an aspect of God’s shalom, a notion that carries with it the idea of completeness, soundness, well-being and prosperity, and includes every aspect of life—personal, relational and national. Moreover, because shalom arises out of covenant relationship and companionship with God, holiness and righteousness are integral to the meaning and practice of justice.” Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 72.

¹² Walton, 461.