DAVID'S SIN AND REPENTANCE

2 Samuel 8:1-12:13

Key verse 12:13

"Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan replied, 'The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.'"

God established the kingdom of David. There were two pur­poses in doing this. The first was that God really wanted David to shepherd his people, as he had shepherded them. The second was that God wanted to raise his people as a priestly nation through David's kingdom, so that his peo­ple might fill the earth with the know­ledge of God. God blessed David and his people when he es­tablished his kingdom. So David and his people had to maintain God's blessing. But to main­tain God's bless­ing might be the hardest thing for David. In to­day's pas­sage we learn how David sinned against God, and how he repented.

I. David shows God's kindness to others (8:1-10:19)

**First,** David's victories. (8:1-18) Until David's time, Israel had been an op­pressed nation. Her battles had been defensive attempts to sur­vive in the midst of powerful enemies. Under David, Israel became an empire. Also, David subdued Israel's ancient enemies: Philistia, Moab, Edom, Aram. He extended the borders of Israel to the Euphra­tes by de­feat­ing Hadadezer king of Zobah, the major power of the time. Da­vid consoli­dated his empire with strategically located garri­sons. Thus, he brought neighboring nations under the aegis of his control.

Why was he successful in whatever he did? It was because God bless­ed him with victories everywhere he went, on the ba­sis of the promises God had given his servant Abraham. David was worthy of receiving God's blessing because he loved God more than God's blessing. For example, David took much plun­der from his enemies, especially from Hadadez­er king of Zo­bah. David, however, did not keep any of the plunder for him­self; he totally dedicated to the Lord all of the plunder taken from the ene­mies. Even though David was a young and vic­to­rious king in his 'thirties,' he served God's will in his own generation; he reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for his people. David want­ed to please God by at­tempt­ing to help his people grow in the know­ledge of God and by raising his people as a priestly na­tion. David was a king. But, in es­sence, he was a servant of God who knew God's heart. He also was a shepherd of his people who honor­ed them as God's pre­cious children and as his own brothers. Da­vid was a man of great ability. So he could have done everything all by himself--as Saul had done. But he did not do so. He co-worked with his men. David appoint­ed Joab over the army, Je­hoshaphat as the recorder and Zadok and Ahimelech as priests. David had gained their respect as their lea­d­er and never lost it; his secret was that he always thanked and hon­ored God; thus he could also treat his men with thanks and hon­or. In this way, he could main­tain their respect to the end.

**Second,** David shows kindness to Saul's family. (9:1-13) What did David do in times of God's blessing? Did he attempt to re­taliate against his old enemies, as the heros and heroines in his­tory usually had done? No, never! To our surprise, David was ready to show kind­ness to the family of Saul, even though Saul had made him a high level political criminal and had sought to rid the earth of him. Even if he had just ig­nored Saul's family, we could admire him highly; but David was wil­ling to show his kindness to Saul's family. It was be­cause David was a man of God, and because he remembered his cove­nant friendship with Jonathan.

In the past, David was in an ad­verse situ­ation in which he could have been destroyed; he was utterly helpless. He thought his loy­alty was betrayed, and that there was no way to re­store his relationship with King Saul. So, he had to run for his life. In this time of dis­tress, Jonathan came to Da­vid and made a covenant of eter­nal friendship. In this way, Jonathan encour­aged him. (1 Sa 20:8) In the course of running for his life, David had become ex­hausted; then, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. Prob­ably, at that time, David had wanted to give up on his life rather than be driven anymore as a politi­cal cri­minal. At this cru­cial moment, Jona­than, Saul's son, again came to the Desert of Ziph to help him to find strength in God. He said, "Don't be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Is­rael." (1 Sa 23:14-18) As the saying goes, Jona­than was a friend in need, so he was a friend indeed. He also was a true friend in God. In this way, Jonathan proved that he loved the truth of God, and that he loved God more than his own life. To David, Jonathan was an unforgettable friend to whom he owed his life. As long as David remembered God's grace, he could not forget Jona­than's friendship and his kindness--es­peci­ally his covenant friend­ship with him.

One day David ask­ed, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Then David was told that there was still a son of Jonathan, Mephi­bosheth, who was crippled in both feet. When he was five ye­ars old, the news about the deaths of Saul and Jonathan came. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and was crippled. When David was told that a son of Jona­than was still alive, he was in­deed happy, thinking that he could pay back his debt to Jona-than. So David immediate­ly sent for Meph­ibo­sheth. As soon as David saw him he said to him, "Don't be afraid, for I will surely show you kind­ness for the sake of your father Jona­than. I will restore to you all the land that be­longed to your grand­father Saul, and you will always eat at my table." (9:7) Da­vid not only re­­stored his land and his per­sonal prop­erty, he also promised to treat him as one of his own royal sons by let­ting him eat at the king's table. So Mephi­bosheth lived like the king's son in Je­rusa­lem, and he always ate at the king's table. Mephibo­sheth did not deserve the favor Da­vid bestowed on him. But in David's eyes he deserved it be­cause of his father Jona­than, who had been faithful to David even at per­sonal risk and cost to him­self. David had not for­gotten God's grace to him through Jona­than when he was in the midst of adversity. David was a man who knew God's grace. So, he was able to show such mar­velous kindness to Me­phibo­sheth. His kindness stemm­ed from God's grace. It is very im­por­tant for all of us to know God's grace personal­ly so that we can be gracious to others.

**Third,** David shows kindness to Hanun. (10:1-19) Hanun be­came king of Ammon at the death of his father Nahash. Many say that perhaps a formal treaty existed between the Israel­ites and the Ammonites. But there is no record of this. Since David lived in exile and sought ref­uge with such neighboring people as the Philistines when he was running for his life from Saul, we can guess that he made a per­sonal relation­ship with Nahash during this time.

At the news of Nahash's death, David sent a delega­tion to pay his condolences to Hanun. The prince who had just succeeded his fa­­ther as king did not know how to deal with the delegation. So he soug­ht counsel from his nobles. Their counseling was ve­ry negative. They sug­gest­ed that the delegates were spies who had come to spy out the land, not to express David's sym­pathy concerning Hanun's fa­ther. When Hanun heard this, he was so upset that he seized Da­vid's men, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away. The young king did to David's men some­thing a mischiev­ous child might have done. What Hanun did seems funny. But his childish act offended the na­tional pride of Israel. David did not sit quietly. He sent his army to des­troy the Ammon­ites. Hanun's small mistake sparked a war of interna­tional proportions. When Hanun king of Ammon saw David's men coming, he real­ized he had made a big mistake. But it was too late to re­store a na­tional relation­ship with David. In his perplexity Hanun hired twenty thou­sand Aramean foot sol­diers first; lat­er, he hired some more. These were un­der the con­trol of Had­adezer, the most po­werful ruler of the whole area. This time Hanun made an even greater mis­take be­cause of his fear.

When Joab, the commander-in-chief of David's army, saw the su­­perior number of enemies, he said, "Be strong and let us fight brave­ly for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight." (10:12) The Israel­ites fought for their homes and for God's people. On the other hand, mer­cenaries fought for wages. Super­ior num­bers and better weapons did not win the day. David's men who fought with courage and spirit won the vic­to­ry. Ha­nun's fail­ure teaches us that we must learn how to ac­cept oth­ers' kind­ness, not to mention how to show kindness to others, as well.

II. David's sin and repentance (11:1-12:13)

**First,** David's sin. (11:1-27) In ancient times, kings went off to war in the springtime, and during the wintertime they came back to their base camp and stationed there until the new springtime came. One springtime, David sent Joab, his army commander, out with the whole Is­rae­lite army to fight, but he remained in Jeru­salem. D­avid was suc­cessful, so he thought that he could stay at home. Humanly speaking, it was reason­able for him to do so. But from God's point of view, he was guilty of negli­gence, since he was assigned to unite the kingdom of Israel and expand its ter­ritory all the more. Ig­noring his mis­sion, David took a vaca­tion and slept late while his sol­diers were en­gaging in a bloody battle to de­stroy the Am­mon­ites. One even­ing David got up from his bed and walked around. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The wo­man was very beautiful. David found out who she was. She was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his most loyal gener­als. David should not have molested the wife of one of his generals. But he brought her to his palace and slept with her. Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, "I am preg­nant." To a servant of God, it was tragic news. David immediately thought about how to cover up his sin. Da­vid sent word to Joab to send Uriah the Hittite to him; he thought he could make Uriah sleep with his wife. When he was brought to him, David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." But Uriah did not go down to his house. Instead, he slept at the en­trance to the palace with his master's ser­vants.

When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" David appeared to be mindful of Uriah. But in real­ity, he was only eager to cover up his sin. On the other hand, Uriah appeared to be unfaithful to his wife. But he was not. He was very faithful to God. Thus he was faithful to his wife. He was also very loyal to his king and to his master Joab. What he said to David was heart-moving. Look at 11:11. "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!" Uriah's loyalty was indeed remark­able. Nev­er­the­less, David tried again to make Uriah go home and wash his feet. But it did not work as David had arranged. When David knew that he fail­ed to cover up his sin, he decid­ed to des­troy Uriah by putting him in the front line where the fight­ing was fiercest. When David heard of Uriah's death, he brought Bath­sheba, the wife of Uriah, to his palace and made her one of his wives, and she bore him a son. In this way, the anointed ser­vant of God and the shepherd of his people turn­ed out to be a thief, a liar and a murderer. The author of this book com­ments on this event: "But the thing David had done dis­pleased the Lord." (11:27b) David was a man with God's Spir­it and a good shepherd of his people. But when he became lazy, he was vulnerable to Satan's attack, and soon he be­came the prey of Satan. Here we learn that laziness is not a small matter for any human being, for it is against God's truth in the creation of man­kind. (Ge 1:28). We also learn that no man is per­fect. Only God is perfect.

**Second,** David's repentance. (12:1-13) Because of his sin, David became very defensive and self-righteous. No one could dare tell him anything. David was too sensi­tive to hear any­thing. Everyone kept himself or herself in acquiescence. But God did not leave him alone. God sent Nathan the prophet to help him repent. When Nathan went to David he told him a par­able. It was a story about a rich man. This man had a large flock of his own sheep. But he did not take a sheep from among his own sheep to cook for his guest. Instead, he took the ewe lamb of a poor man who had only one ewe lamb, which he loved like his only daughter. David burned with ang­er against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anoin­ted you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Ju­dah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?" Nat­han also told him about the fu­ture calamities and dis­grace that would come upon him.

What was David's response to Nathan's rebuke? In an­cient times, it was common sense that no one had the right to re­buke a king. If anyone offended a king's pride, he could not ex­pect to sur­vive on the earth. Now David was the king over his people. So he could have done away with Nathan with his power and authority. But he did not do so. Rather he humbled himself and repented his sin before the old man. As we know well, it is not at all easy for anybody to repent his or her sin. Especially, for a king, repentance is not neces­sary, for the king himself is the law. But to our surprise, David re­pented his sin. With our common sense, it is hard for us to under­stand how he could repent his sin. But when we think of him from God's point of view, we see that he could repent his sin be­cause God in­tervened in his life by sending Nathan the pro­phet. God's grace is always deeper than the ocean. As God loved him so much that he took him from the pasture and from fol­lowing the flock to be ruler over his people Israel, so God could have abandoned him, for David despised his love. But God did not do so. Rather God gave him the spirit of re­pentance by giving him a clear message through Nathan. David realized God's love through this message, even though it was a heart-break­ing one.

David's repentance was "thorough" and "sincere." Look at 12:13a. "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" Psalm 51 tells us how David repented. David knew he should have been abandoned by God because of his sins. But he depended on God's love and compassion when he asked God to blot out his transgressions and to wash away all his iniqui­ty. He asked God's forgiveness. (Ps 51:1-3) Even though David sinned against God, we see the true great­ness of a man, Da-vid. Even though he was a king, David hon­ored God as God. Da-vid knew that his sin was not before men but before God. So he said, "Against you, you only, have I sin­ned and done what is evil in your sight." (Ps 51:4a) David could have act­ed like an ordinary king by ju­stifying his sins after dam­aging and des­troying others' lives. But David maintained his posi­­tion as a king ordained by God by his re­pent­ance before God.

When David enjoyed his physical plea­sure he was not hap­py be­cause sin was living in him; the Holy Spi­rit left him, and evil spi­rits came into him and tor­mented him. So he cried out, "Cre­ate in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spi­rit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Re­store to me the joy of your sal­va­tion and grant me a willing spi­rit, to sus­tain me." (Ps 51: 10-12) David knew that there was no method for the grace of forgive­ness other than the repent­ance of sins. If his sin problem could have been solved by offer­ing a huge sacrifice, he would have offered a large num­ber of moo­ing bulls and bleating sheep. But David knew that God would not take pleas­ure in burnt of­ferings. He knew that God would accept his re-pen­tance only when he repented with a broken spirit and con­trite heart. In short, David repented his sin before God with a bro­ken spi­rit.

In this passage we learned why David sinned against God, and how he repented his sin before God. David sinned against God when he had a vacation spirit. Probably he want­ed to rest only physi­cally. But when he rested physi­cally, his spirit rested simul­taneous­ly. Thus, he became vul­nerable to Satan's attack. After committing sin, David suffered from unutterable troubles and distress and the tor­ment of the evil spirits. David realized through this ex­perience that it was indeed good to dwell in the house of God. (Ps 84:10) David also learned that re­pentance to God must be with a broken heart. Most of all, David learned that the grace of God's forgive­ness of sin is truly life-giving. David said, "Blessed is he whose transgres­sions are for­given, whose sins are cover­ed. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him..." (Ps 32:1,2a) It is indeed mar­ve­l­ous to know that Ab­ra­ham be­came the ancestor of faith with his ab­solute faith in the promises of God, but David became our ancestor of faith through his sincere repentance. David's true great­ness does not lie in his human greatness, but in his act of tho­rough and sincere repentance, and in his faith in the grace of God's for­give­ness of sin. In the sec­ular world, de­ceiving or being de­ceived is what mat­ters, and de­vious people are fre­quently re­cog­nized as great men. But in the spirit­ual world, those who have faith in the prom­ises of God and who re­pent of their sins before God are high­ly hon­or­ed as spiri­tual men who are pleas­ing to God. David was known to be the great­est man who ever lived. But we must know that he became the greatest man through his "re­pentance." May God rich­ly bless you when you repent of your sins before God sin­cerely.