

2 Samuel 11:1-15 A better way out

11 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. ³ David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴ So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵ The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

⁶ So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰ When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" ¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." ¹² Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, ¹³ David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

¹⁵ In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die."

When you find yourself in a tough situation, do you prefer to find an easy way out, or a better way out? Is there a difference between an easy way out and a better way out? Does God want to give an easy way out of tough situations, or a better way out? Today's Old Testament story can help us consider this dilemma, where our reading brings us to a very negative point in the behaviour of King David.

Up until this chapter (2 Sam 11), David's attitude & behaviour was seen in a positive light. From his very humble beginnings, he had gone from his shepherd-boy days, to now shepherding the whole-of-Israel as their king. The Lord had anointed him for the task, and David had a true 'heart for the Lord'.

David was going so well. The Lord was with him - even though David wouldn't get to build the Temple that he had hoped to build. (His son, Solomon would be the one to build the Temple in Jerusalem.) But apart from this, the rest of David's life had so far been filled with success & victory. God had paved an enormous path of blessing for David. And this blessing wasn't simply for the sake of David – it was for the sake of God's own people. God promised he would bless his people in the land of Canaan – and so he did. And David had such a great run... up until this point.

So, what went wrong? Yes, it's true that we see the overall life of David as very positive. Yes, he is still referred to as "a man after God's own heart". But what went wrong for this enthusiastic king?

Things went wrong, when this enthusiastic king got jealous. This enthusiastic king saw a woman who already belonged to another man. Her name was Bathsheba and she was married to Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was an outstandingly committed soldier – devoted to God & to King David.

From the high point, on top of his roof, King David saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing. Soon enough, he inquired about her. The report came back that she was indeed the wife of Uriah. But despite this information, King David had Bathsheba brought to him. King David then slept with Bathsheba.

It would seem that King David only wanted to "borrow" Bathsheba for a while. How convenient for David to sleep with Bathsheba while her husband, Uriah, was out at battling the Ammonites. But what seemed so convenient, suddenly became inconvenient, when Bathsheba told King David three little words which many a male has dreaded to hear. She sent a message to say, "I am pregnant". From here, King David started trying to find '*an easy way out*', rather than '*a better way out*'.

With his good reputation at stake - it would have been 'unthinkable' for King David to simply 'own up to his offense'. How would any man tell another man that he made their wife pregnant? So, King David tried to save face - he tried to find an easy way out.

So here was the easy way out... Get Uriah to stay home with his wife Bathsheba ASAP. Yes, of course! This way, it would look as though the pregnancy came from Uriah, and Uriah would ever know any different. Surely Uriah wouldn't think of comparing the baby's face with the eyes & nose of the king?

But it wasn't such an easy way out. Uriah was too committed to his country. Uriah felt it would be disrespectful to enjoy life at home while his country was at war. The easy way out just got harder.

So, King David resorted to a second plan by getting Uriah drunk. Surely this would cloud Uriah's judgement!? Surely a good dose of alcohol would get him home to bed!? But Uriah was too committed to his king & country. Uriah didn't go home & lay with his wife, Bathsheba. King David definitely had no easy way out.

With his reputation at stake, King David then implemented his final plan. He secretly organised the death of Uriah, as he sent Uriah back into battle. All-the-more, King David made Uriah carry his own letter of death sentence – and Uriah never knew the contents of the letter. This letter for Joab, had instructions to ensure that Uriah would die on the frontline of battle. How audacious can one get? And soon enough, Uriah died on the frontline as planned. King David wanted an easy way out, but in due course, he would be confronted by a prophet of the Lord about the death of Uriah.

What lessons can we take from this ancient story as we hear it today? Yes, there are the obvious problems of coveting and adultery. But there are also much broader lessons to learn here, than just those issues. We don't need to compare our mistakes with David or anyone else. Our sins don't have to be anything like King David's with Bathsheba or Uriah.

Besides, it's too easy for us to make this into a common ethical story, where the focus is on how pious & self-restrained we can be before God. I'm not sure that's so helpful. But, if we can move away from just trying to be good enough or religious enough for God, we are then free in the Lord to consider how we can be a blessing to others – even within our errors & faults. After all, God is keen to take us right where we are, and use us to be a blessing to others.

So, we can ask the question: In painful situations, where we might be at fault in any friendship or relationship, 'Is looking for an easy way out really

going to be an easy way out?' Did David pray to the Lord before he tried to fix his initial errors with Uriah? Do we pray to the Lord, before we try to fix our fresh mistakes?

All of us have made mistakes in relating to other people. We have all offended someone at some point. We all wrestle with how-best to move forward in relationships.

Yet, while fear may tempt us to follow our own 'easy way out', God is able to provide *a better way out* for us. And it always begins with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are God's baptised people. We can confidently ask God for help. We can trust God to fix the messes that we weave for ourselves, even though it may take us in an unfamiliar path.

With prayer & humility, King David could have made better decisions about making things right for Uriah & Bathsheba. There could have been a whole range of better outcomes if Uriah was alive. The sooner we pray and give our mistakes to God, surely this is better than trying to first fix things in our own ways. We will never know what might have happened if King David sought forgiveness from Uriah, instead of killing Uriah. Seeking forgiveness would have been a much better way out. And this 'better way out' could only come from the hand of God.

When God brought his greatest love into this world, the cross of Jesus Christ was not the easy way out. There was suffering for Jesus; and there was suffering for those who followed him & believed in him.

But the cross of Christ was the better way out - and for us, it was the only way out, of sin & evil. Fixing our sin required the very best of God to save us, not the easiest way out.

And if we are to bless our neighbour – both in the church & out the church – then let us bless them with the very best of God. Let us seek God in repentance & in humility - and await his blessing to refresh us with better ways forward from week to week. May his Spirit guide our ways. Amen.