

## **“A Bigger Miracle”**

*Reading: 2 Samuel 11:1-17; Psalm 51*

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

Which is more important on the scale of human history: two enemy nations in, say, central Asia negotiating the end to a war, or a movie star having a baby? Of course we would all answer that the negotiations matter more, because tens of thousands of lives might be at stake, and maybe even the stability of an entire region of the world. But which news story are we more likely to pay attention to? News outlets know that more people are more interested in gossip than a complicated story about politics in some part of the world we're not familiar with, important though they may be. We have a sick relationship with celebrity: our culture desperately desires fame and we want to be like those famous people on TV, but when they begin their meltdown, we enjoy it like a spectator sport. We watch the rich and powerful thinking that they lead perfect lives, and when they don't, we gloat over their misery, forgetting that they're probably not really all that different than us in their temptations and foibles.

We can only imagine what the tabloids would have said about King David. He's the perfect example to us of why we'd better not set famous people on a pedestal. Famous people have been falling off their pedestals for a long, long time. No matter how good your publicist is, no matter how savvy your image consultants are, no matter how many speechwriters you have working for you, you've still got that root problem that all of us have, that problem that the church calls "sin." We are all tempted away from the good that we know we ought to do, and we are all tempted toward the evil that we know we ought not to do, and sooner or later we will all give in to those temptations. Celebrity and power do not protect you from those temptations; based on the sorts of things we see famous people doing sometimes, it appears that they actually make it harder to resist temptation.

King David lived a rags-to-riches life like the best of them. As we read last week, he started out in complete obscurity as an ignored shepherd boy, only to rise over time to become the king of the entire nation of Israel. And not only was he a perfect example of going from obscurity to celebrity, he was an example of exactly what God has always been looking for throughout this story of creation and redemption. God achingly desires people after God's own heart, people whose hearts resonate with God's concerns, people who are willing to walk with God and live in His presence. David was one of those people.

But we begin our chapter of the story today by watching David's meltdown, the sort of meltdown that would be plastered across the tabloids for months. At the height of his power, with his kingdom secure and his name sealed in the history books, David goes the way of so many powerful figures throughout history and gives in to sexual temptation. He falls in love with Bathsheba, a woman who is married to a loyal soldier and godly man named Uriah, and when David gets Bathsheba pregnant, he starts his scheming. At first he tries to make it look like Uriah is the father, but that doesn't work out. David therefore conspires with his general Joab to send Uriah out to the front lines, then have everyone around him retreat, leaving him to die. It's a complicated way to murder Uriah, in other words, not to mention the other uninvolved soldiers who also died in the retreat.

One of the things that caught me as I read this story this time is how many people David involved in all of this. There are messengers going back and forth between David and Bathsheba, and

even if they didn't know the exact content of the messages, they surely worked out more or less what was happening. Joab was in on the scheme, and surely at least a few of his subordinates had to be filled in on the plan, too. And then, when Uriah is dead, David made Bathsheba his wife. People aren't stupid; surely if those around David hadn't suspected by now, they were catching on at that point. David does all of this as though no one is catching on, as though he's in no danger of any sort of consequences — as though he's the king, on top, where no one can touch him or say no to him. That's one of the deepest dangers of sin: that if we get away with it once, or for a little while, we think that we're so smart that we can play with fire and not get hurt. The rules that apply to other people don't apply to smart cookies like me who can scheme and sneak and get away with murder.

And then a word comes from God. The prophet Nathan shows up and has a few choice words for David, laying it all out in front of him, shattering any illusions David might have that nobody saw anything, and, by the way, giving God's opinion on the matter as well. Why does God really care about this, anyway? Why is it that if I do something wrong that doesn't really involve God in any way, why does God still hate that sin? First, as Nathan tells David, God did so much to bring David to his throne, and God would have been willing to continue blessing him even more, but David took God's grace and used it for evil. That *does* involve God; it shows that David despises God's relationship with him. And more than that, we have to remember that even if David did not hurt God directly, God loved Uriah, too, and the other soldiers who were killed: when we hurt people whom God loves, or the creation God made and loves, or ourselves, who are also a beloved part of God's creation, we are hurting those things and people that rightly belong to God. God takes that every bit as personally as you would take someone hurting one of your children.

Nathan cuts right through David's callous disregard for sin. "You are the man," he says, the one who does exactly what you condemn in someone else. You are the one who abuses power, who sins with a high hand, thinking that no one sees. It's bad enough to do what is evil, but it's far, far worse to do it with a calloused heart. Surely this is bad enough that David has completely ruined his part in God's story. We've read about a lot of questionable characters God has included in His story; we've seen liars and cheats and prostitutes and even a murderer or two, but David's actions surely rank him among the absolute worst offenders. He had been known as a man after God's own heart, an example for all of us of how we ought to tune our own hearts to sing God's grace, but surely now David is like his predecessor Saul: blacklisted and cut off from God's plan.

John Cassian was a Christian theologian who lived around the year AD 400. At one point he wrote this: "It is a bigger miracle to eject a passion from your own body than it is to eject an evil spirit from another's body. It is a bigger miracle to be patient and refrain from anger than it is to control the demons which fly through the air." When we think of miracles, we probably tend to think of the grand displays of God's power over nature: parting the sea, or calming the storm, or walking on water. But Cassian is pointing out to us how difficult it is for us to control what's inside us; it takes greater effort to control our passions than it does to part a sea. "Humility...is the queen of all the virtues," Cassian said, "she is the stable foundation of the house of heaven, she is the peculiar and marvelous gift of the Savior." It's a bigger miracle for you and me to put humility into practice than it is to calm the storm. It's a bigger miracle for a person's heart to shift from focusing inward to focusing on God than it is to walk on water.

And this is why we still speak of David as a man after God's own heart, even after all he did. This is what marks his heart as different, because when he is confronted by his sin, David humbles himself and confesses. Psalm 51 is his confession, his song of humility accepting the evil he has committed and asking for God's forgiveness. He holds nothing back in that psalm. There is no attempt at explanation or justification of what he has done. He calls his sin exactly what it is. He asks for mercy, knowing that he deserves nothing and can only hope in God's pure grace. He asks God to cleanse him, knowing that he does not have that ability within himself — it takes a miraculous act of God to cleanse us from sin. He cries out his desire to have a restored relationship with God and a hope of singing God's praises again: he is a deep enough person not to ask God to take away the consequences of what he has done, but rather to ask that God would not cast him away from God's presence. He casts himself utterly and completely on God in his confession.

This is what sets David apart as a man after God's own heart — not that he is perfect, but that he is willing to humble himself and confess his sin and repent of it. We've been reading through *The Story* for three months now, and hopefully you've noticed that there is a sort of a cycle that keeps repeating itself: God does something great, God's people respond at first, then God's people start to go their own way and reject God's leading, and things start to fall apart. That has happened over and over again. Sometimes God's people have persisted in their rejection of God, like Saul did, or like the Israelites did when they were wandering in the desert. But then there are times when they humble themselves, when they confess their sins, and those are the moments when the story takes a step forward. That is the key of holiness, of a life lived pleasing to God: not that we make ourselves perfect, but that we confess our failures and let God move us beyond them.

David humbled himself and confessed, and God used David as the beginning of a line of kings that would give rise to Jesus, the eternal King. But we cannot ignore the lasting consequences of David's sin; confession is not a "get out of jail free" card. He thought his acts were done in secret, but others saw, and they were influenced, and tragedy continued to visit David's family. The son he had conceived with Bathsheba did not survive. Later, David's sons imitated their father's violence. One of them, named Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar. Tamar's brother Absalom murdered Amnon in revenge, and later, Absalom led a rebellion against his own father and was killed.

Our hearts ought to be broken at the consequences of David's choices, because David's family is not so different from our own. We need to have broken hearts at our own sin. God's story takes a step forward in our lives as we humble ourselves before Him and confess our sins. Having the humility to confess your sins is a bigger miracle than we give it credit for. What do you need to confess to God today? And what might God be able to do through your confession?



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)