

Drop the Act

2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15 (NIV)

²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. ¹ The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴ "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." ⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." ⁷ 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. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' 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. ¹⁴ But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the LORD, the son born to you will die." ¹⁵ After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill.

I can't believe what I'm seeing. David was such a good guy. The way he treated King Saul as Saul was trying to kill him. How he led our armies into battle year after year and the LORD granted him victory after victory. I don't know why this year he decided to stay home. His eyes wandered. He sent me to bring him Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. He had his way with her. I was tasked to bring a message from Bathsheba to the King: she was pregnant. King David called Bathsheba's husband Uriah back from the frontlines. Such a dedicated soldier, Uriah didn't even go home to his wife. Two days passed and David sent Uriah back into the field. In days the report came back: Uriah had died in battle. Was that an accident? In Jerusalem, we mourned Uriah, the fallen soldier. Bathsheba, his wife, now widow, mourned him. As soon as the mourning period was over, David had me bring Bathsheba to him again. This time he married her. Many were saying how compassionate David was to take in a war widow and care for her. It didn't sit right with me. Less than eight months later, a suspiciously short but believable time frame, a son was born to David from Uriah's wife. Uriah's funeral now looked different. The clues were all there. Did my King really do what I think he did? Do I call him out? Do I play along?

Could you imagine being one of David's attendants and having those insider details that we have reading the account in 2 Samuel chapter 11? We know David committed adultery with Bathsheba. We know David had Uriah killed. Despite appearances, "The thing David had done displeased the LORD." (verse 27) That phrase sends a shiver up the spine. God, the one who has toppled leaders and destroyed nations, who set the sun, moon, and stars in place, is displeased with David and what he did. What would happen next? Instead of pondering that question, David worked all that much harder to hide what he had done and acted as if nothing wrong, nothing shameful had taken place. What are you doing, David? This is not you.

Well, we would never do anything like that, nothing that would displease the LORD like David had done...right? I haven't had an affair. I didn't kill a man and cover it up. But there are skeletons in your closet, aren't there - things that you have done and tried to cover up? What shameful things have you done in the dark of the night when no one else is around? Have you found yourself looking at websites that you know that you should not be looking at and as your spouse comes walking in you quickly close the browser? When has someone asked you where you had been and you quickly change the subject and dodge the question because you don't want to admit where you were or what you had done? When you relate a story do you carefully word it so as to leave out what exactly you were doing, the part that incriminates you? When do you cover up your sin and act like it never happened?

We cover our sins up because people can't know what we've done. But God knows. God sees through the charade, the cover up. God is not ignorant of your sin. Acting like it never happened just increases the internal anguish. The guilt mounts as we hold this inside and dare not confess, dare not speak of it. We think if no one knows, then they can't be displeased. But God knows. God is displeased. What will happen next? How will he punish me?

The LORD sent Nathan to David to tell David a story, a story about sheep and lambs, about a rich man and a poor man, about a rich man who was not content to use his wealth but was compelled to take and use the property of others for himself, a rich man who had huge number of sheep and cattle, but couldn't sacrifice a single one for a visitor. Instead, he took the little ewe lamb from the poor man, an animal that the poor man had treated like a daughter, who loved and cared for his lamb, but the rich man slaughtered it and fed it to his visitor, not out of need but out of greed, unwilling to give up any of his wealth for a guest. David was outraged! Vein popping from his forehead and he declared not only that this rich man repay the poor man four times over - as the law required – but also that this man who did this must die...because he did such a thing and had no pity! (verses 5, 6)

"You are the man!" (verse 7) Nathan tells David of the Lord's displeasure over him, reminds him of all the things that the LORD had given him, and yet David was so greedy and pitiless to strike down Uriah so that he could have his wife. "Uriah may have died at the hands of the Ammonites, but it was you, David, who killed him. You are the man! (verse 7) Drop the act. Stop covering up your sin."

"I have sinned against the LORD." (verse 13) It's a simple statement. No excuses or rationalizations offered. "But I was weak!" "But she was willing!" No attempts to minimize what he had done. "You know, soldiers die every day." No more acting to cover up this sin. "You got the wrong guy. I would never do such a thing." No, David just admitted it. "I have sinned against the LORD." (verse 13) He dropped the act and came clean before God. David confessed the sins he had worked so hard to cover up.

Immediately, God forgave him. Nathan responded to David saying, "The LORD has taken away your sin." (verse 13) No hesitation. No required period of mourning. No act demanded to prove that he was really repentant. No punishment to make him pay for what he had done. David dropped his act of self-sustained moral perfection and God immediately brought forgiveness to him, not because David had earned or deserved it by his confession, but because forgiveness is what our God gives. God already saw that from David's line God's Son would come into the world, live perfectly for us, and then sacrifice himself on the cross to pay for our sins. Knowing that this would happen, God could immediately forgive David and restore him to being right with God. David went forward in forgiveness to face a great tragedy in his life. His son's illness and death were not God punishing him for the adultery and murder, but he was correcting him, molding him to keep him close to God, to always following in the LORD's ways, to never again be that pitiless man that he had been.

That immediate forgiveness is held out for us as well. We come to church, we reflect on God's Word, and it becomes very clear to us that we have fallen so short of what God expects. We try to clean it up, make it look like it never happened. We leave out those details that would make us look unfavorable in the eyes of others. We think we can cover up our sin. But then God says it: "You are the man!" (verse 7) You are guilty! You can't hide this from me. So, drop the act. Stop pretending that you can cover up your sin so that no one ever sees it. You're not fooling me and you never will. I know what you have done, and, yes, I am displeased with it. But I'm calling you out so that you can know that you don't have to hide your sin from me. You don't have to hide it because I forgave it. I took it away. You are restored. You are perfect in my sight right now because I have taken your sin away.

Just as he did for David, God calls us to drop the act. Stop pretending that if you omit talking about your sins that it means they didn't happen. God knows that you don't want to admit them. God knows that they are shameful. But he comes to you, confronting your secret sins so that you can stop pretending to be something that you are not. Then we confess like David did, "I have sinned against the LORD." (verse 13) Whether it's a confession made with your lips to a pastor, to a friend, to a spouse, to a family member, or in a room alone, God hears it. He tells you in his Word, "You are forgiven! The LORD has taken away your sin!" And it's true. God knows who you are. You are forgiven. The LORD is no longer displeased with you. You are restored. No retribution. No repayment. Your sin is taken away.

As we began this morning's worship, we confessed our sins. And as God said to David through Nathan, we heard the announcement of forgiveness: "The LORD has taken away your sin." (verse 13) This is the same absolution that we can share with our brothers and sisters in Christ, with our friends, our family, our spouses. When they gather up the courage to confess their secret sins, the sins that they had been trying to cover up, we announce: "The LORD has taken away your sin!" (verse 13) We hear it again in the Lord's Supper. "Your sins are forgiven." Your sins against God, your sins against each other. "The LORD has taken away your sin!" (verse 13)

Before God, we drop the act and stop trying to cover up our sins. Instead, we see clearly who we are. We repent. And God declares of you that he has taken your sins away. Go and live in that forgiveness, just as David did. Amen.