

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE SIN OF HIS LIFE

(II Samuel 6-19)

O Father, I have sinned! I have done
The thing I thought I never more should do!
My days were set before me, light all through;
But I have made dark alas, too true!
And drawn dense clouds between me and my Sun.”

- Septimus Sutton

THE chronicler omits all reference to this terrible blot on David's life. The older record sets down each item without extenuation or excuse. The gain for all penitents would so much outweigh the loss to the credit of the man after God's own heart. These chapters have been trodden by myriads who, having well-nigh lost themselves in the same dark labyrinth of sin, have discovered the glimmer of light by which the soul may pass back into the day. “Thy **sins, which are many, are forgiven thee; go in peace.**”

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO DAVID'S SIN

The warm poetic temperament of the king specially exposed him to a temptation of this sort; but the self-restrained habit of his life would have prevailed, had there not been some slackening of the loin, some failure to trim the lamp. For seventeen years he had enjoyed an unbroken spell of prosperity; in every war successful, on every great occasion increasing the adulation of his subjects. This was fraught with peril. The rigours of the Alps are less to be dreaded than the heat of the enervating plains of the Campagna.

In direct violation of the law of Moses which forbade the multiplication of wives on the part of Hebrew kings, “**lest their hearts should turn away**” we are distinctly told that, when established at Jerusalem, David took unto him more concubines and wives; sowing to himself the inevitable harvest of heart-burning, jealousy, quarrelling, and crime, of which the harem must always be the prolific source, besides fostering in David himself a habit of sensual indulgence, which predisposed him to the evil solicitation of that evening hour.

He had also yielded to a fit of indolence, unlike the martial spirit of the Lion of Judah; allowing Joab and his brave soldiers to do the fighting around the walls of Kabbah, while he tarried still at Jerusalem.

It was a mood to which Uriah administered a stinging rebuke when he refused to go to his own house whilst his comrades and the Ark were encamped on the open field.

One sultry afternoon the king had risen from his afternoon siesta, and was lounging on his palace-roof. In that hour of enervated ease, to adopt Nathan's phrase, a traveler came to him, a truant thought, to satisfy whose hunger he descended into the home of a poor man and took his one ewe lamb, although his own folds were filled with flocks. We will not extenuate his sin by dwelling on Bathsheba's willing complicity, or on her punctilious ceremonial purification; while she despised her plighted married truth to her absent husband. The Scripture record lays the burden of the sin on the king alone, before whose absolute power Bathsheba may have felt herself obliged to yield.

One brief spell of passionate indulgence, and then! - his character blasted irretrievably; his peace vanished; the foundations of his kingdom imperiled; the Lord displeased; and great occasion given to his enemies to blaspheme! Let us beware of our light, unguarded hours. Moments of leisure are more to be dreaded than those of strenuous toil. Middle life for David was above fifty years of age has no immunity from temptations and perils which beset the young. One false step taken in the declension of spiritual vigor may ruin a reputation built up by years of religious exercise.

A message came one day to David from his companion in sin that the results could not be hidden. It made his blood run with hot fever. The law of Moses punished adultery with the death of each of the guilty pair. Instant steps must be taken to veil the sin! Uriah must come home! He came, but his coming did not help the matter. He refused to go to his home, though on the first night the king sent him thither a mess of meat straight from his table, and on the second made him drunk. The chivalrous soul of the soldier shrank even from the greeting of his wife whilst the great war was still in process.

There was no alternative but that he should die; for dead men tell no tales. If a child was to be born, Uriah's lips, at least, should not be able to disown it. He bore to Joab, all unwitting, the letter which was his own death-warrant. Joab must have laughed to himself when he got it.

"This master of mine can sing psalms with the best; but when he wants a piece of dirty work done, he must come to me. He wants to rid himself of Uriah I wonder why? Well, I'll help him to it. At any rate, he will not be able to say another word to me about Abner. I shall be able to do almost as I will. He will be in my power henceforth."

Uriah was set in the forefront of the hottest battle, and left to die; the significant item of his death being inserted in the bulletin sent to the king from the camp. It was supposed by David that only he and Joab knew of this thing; probably Bathsheba did not guess the costly method by which her character was being protected. She lamented for her dead husband, as was the wont of a Hebrew matron, congratulating herself meanwhile on the fortunate coincidence; and within seven days was taken into David's house. A great relief this! The child would be born under the cover of lawful wedlock! There was one fatal flaw, however, in the whole arrangement, "**The thing that David had done displeased the Lord.**"

David and the world were to hear more of it. But oh, the bitter sorrow, that he who had spoken of walking in his house with a perfect heart, with all his faculty for Divine fellowship, with all the splendid record of his life behind him, should have fallen thus! The psalmist, the king, the man, the lover of God, all trampled in the mire by one dark, wild, passionate outburst. Ah me! My God, grant that I may finish my course without such a rent, such a blot! Oh to wear the white flower of a blameless life to the end!

II. DELAYED REPENTANCE

The better the man, the dearer the price he pays for a short season of sinful pleasure. For twelve whole months the royal sinner wrapt his sin in his bosom, pursed his lips, and refused to confess. But in Psalm 32 he tells us how he felt. His bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long. He was parched with fever heat, as when in Israel for three years there was neither dew nor rain in answer to Elijah's prayer, and every green thing withered in the awful drought of summer. Day and night God's hand lay heavily upon him. When he took Rabbah, he treated the people with ferocious cruelty, as if weary of his own remorse, and expending on others the hardness which he ought to have dealt out to himself. We often excuse ourselves from avenging our own sin, by our harsh behavior and uncharitable judgments towards others. The same spirit, which always characterizes the sullen, uneasy conscience, flamed out in his sentence on the rich man who had taken the poor man's lamb. The Levitical law in such a case only adjudged four-fold restoration (Exodus 22:1). The king pronounced sentence of death.

Nathan's advent on the scene must have been a positive relief. One day whilst statesmen and soldiers were crowding the outer corridor of the cedar palace, the prophet, by right of old acquaintance, made his way through them, and sought a private audience. He told what seemed to be a real and pathetic story of high-handed wrong; and David's anger was greatly kindled against the man who had perpetrated it.

Then, as a flash of lightning on a dark night suddenly reveals to the traveller the precipice, on the void of which he is about to place his foot, the brief awful stunning sentence, "**Thou art the man!**" revealed David to himself in the mirror of his own judgment, and brought him to his knees. Nathan reminded him of the past, and dwelt specially on the unstinted goodness of God. It was a sunny background, the somber hues of which made recent events look the darker.

"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun." "I have sinned against the Lord," was David's only answer a confession followed by a flood of hot tears and instantly his scorched heart found relief. Oh, blessed showers that visit parched souls and parched lands!

When Nathan had gone, he beat out that brief confession into Psalm 51, dedicated to the chief musician, that all the world might use it, setting it to music if they would. The one sin and the many transgressions; the evil done against God, as though even Uriah might not be named in the same breath; the confession of inbred evil; the ache of the broken bones; the consciousness of the unclean heart; the loss of joy; the fear of forfeiting the Holy Spirit; the broken and contrite heart thus the surcharged waters of the inner lake broke forth turbid and dark. Ah, those cries for the multitude of God's tender mercies! nothing less could erase the dark legend from the book of remembrance, or rub out the stains from his robe, or make the leprous flesh sweet and whole.

To be clean, because purged with hyssop; to be whiter than snow, because washed; to sing aloud once more, because delivered from blood-guiltiness; to be infilled with a steadfast, a willing, and a holy spirit; to be able to point transgressors to the Father's heart these were the petitions which that weak, sin-weary heart laid upon the altar of God, sweeter than burnt-offering or fragrant incense.

But long before this pathetic - prayer was uttered, immediately on his acknowledgment of sin, without the interposition of a moment's interval between his confession and the assurance, Nathan had said, "**The Lord hath put away thy sin.**"

**"I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid.
I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,
And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."**

Penitent soul! Dare to believe in the instantaneous forgiveness of sins. Thou hast only to utter the confession, to find it interrupted with the outbreak of the Father's love. As soon as the words of penitence leave thy lips, they are met by the hurrying assurances of a love which, whilst it hates sin, has never ceased to yearn over the prodigal.

Sin is dark, dangerous, damnable: but it cannot staunch the love of God; it cannot change the love that is not of yesterday, but dates from eternity itself. The only thing that can really hurt the soul is to keep its confession pent within itself. If only with stuttering, broken utterance it dares to cry, "Be merciful to me, the sinner, for the sake of the Blood that was shed," it instantly becomes white as snow on Alpine peaks; pure as the waters of mid-ocean, which the stain of the great city cannot soil; transparent as the blue ether which is the curtain of the tabernacle of the Most High.

~ end of chapter 25 ~

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