

2 Samuel 11

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- [0 : 00] I've got here the Time magazine cover announcing the magazine's person of the year. And some of you may have already seen this image or have heard the news item about it. And the person of the year, according to Time, is a distinction shared by those designated as the Silence Breakers. These are women who found their voice to denounce sexual harassment or assault at the hands of powerful men. And intriguingly, the cover includes the arm of an unidentified victim. And the arm really represents all those who, for whatever reason, feel unable to identify themselves, the multitudes of those whose picture is not on the cover but who are part of this group of women, largely women, designated as the Silence Breakers. I wonder if that arm could have been Bathsheba's arm, a victim of sexual assault at the hands of a powerful man some 3,000 years ago.
- [1 : 20] What do we make of Bathsheba? Bathsheba's story is, like Tamar's and Rahab's and Ruth's, a story of God's grace. Bathsheba is the victim who was vindicated. Bathsheba is the one despised by a man, but dignified by God. The way in which I want to tell the story, at least draw out some elements of the story, is to consider how Bathsheba is treated by David and by God. David, a man of power, takes. And this is, I think, the most significant verb that we have throughout the account. David takes. God, the God of all power, gives. And that's the great contrast that we have. David takes, but God gives. First of all, let's think of David's part in this sorry tale. There's a telling backdrop to David's sin.
- [2 : 26] And that backdrop are the words of warning of Samuel directed to the Israelites as they clamored for a king. Now, this, of course, was many years before, but I think it's very significant in laying the scene or setting the scene for David's sorry performance during this account. In 1 Samuel chapter 8 and verses 11 to 18, you have Samuel warning the Israelites. They're clamoring for a king. And he is warning them about the consequences of being granted this king that they are clamoring for. I'm going to read the verses, and I'll give you the task of identifying what is it that they are warned about. What is the verb that repeats itself time and time again as Samuel warns them about the folly of their request? So 1 Samuel chapter 8 and verse 11. Well, let's read from verse 10. Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, this is what the king who will reign over you will do.

He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest and sell others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

[3 : 53] He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials in attendance.

Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day.

What does Samuel say about kings? They will take, and they will take, and they will take, and they will take again. And that's exactly what David does in this account.

David takes. He's a man of power, and he uses that power to take what he wants. Let's just think about some of the things that he took from Bathsheba.

How Bathsheba is the victim, the one who is taken by David, and the different ways in which she suffers at his hands. I think the first thing I want to say is that David takes Bathsheba's personhood and dignity.

[5 : 07] David raped Bathsheba. He raped her coldly and mercilessly. Now, some might say, well, is that true? Did he actually rape her? Is that the language we find here in the account?

The relationship between David and Bathsheba has often been painted as some kind of adulterous tryst in which Bathsheba is at least in part complicit. Bathsheba is portrayed as the sultry seductress, exhibiting her attributes as the sun sets over Jerusalem.

If you want to confirm that, just go to Google Images and put Bathsheba, and look at the pictures and the paintings that we have of Bathsheba, and you'll see that what I'm saying is true.

That is how she is or has been so often portrayed. But all the evidence points in a different direction, in the direction of David as a rapist, and Bathsheba as the innocent and abused victim.

Let me just set out some of the evidence. In fact, there is so much evidence that time wouldn't allow us to do it justice. But let me just highlight some of the evidence that we have. We have the circumstances of the incident itself, as it's recorded for us in the passage that we read.

[6 : 21] That the topography of Jerusalem at the time places David's palace in a place of prominence looking over the city, giving David from the roof of his palace a clear view of the houses below.

And there's no suggestion that Bathsheba was exhibiting herself. It would have been perfectly possible for David to see her as she bathed without her in any way contributing or facilitating his view.

She could have been bathing in the seeming privacy of an inner courtyard, but of course visible from above. This idea that she was on a roof exhibiting herself is the stuff of fantasy.

It's not what we find in the passage. The time of Bathsheba's bathing, it was in the evening, coincides with what would be a reasonable time for a woman or indeed anybody to bathe at the close of the day.

She was going about her normal business. But more significantly, in terms of the evidence, you have the language of the account. Particularly in verse 4, the verbs that we find in verse 4 paint the picture of David inflamed with lust, procuring a woman to satisfy his sexual appetite.

[7 : 40] Let's just read again what we're told about what happens there in verse 4. Let me just read that or provide you the translation of that sentence in the ESV, which I think captures more, what would I say, more clearly the picture that's been painted.

And we read in the ESV as follows. So David sent messengers and took her. And she came to him and he lay with her. The subject of the verb to take is not the messengers.

It doesn't say that he sent messengers and they brought her. It says he sent messengers and he, David, took her. She's not even at the palace yet. And yet David is identified as the one who took her.

What did Samuel warn the Israelites about? If you have a king, what will he do? He'll take. And that's what David is doing here. He takes Bathsheba. And he lies with her.

And he rapes her. Also, any suggestion that, again, is often made that Bathsheba came willingly and so somehow shares in the guilt, flies, I think, in the face of any reasonable reading of the text.

[9 : 02] We don't even know that she knew what was awaiting her at the palace. But even if she had an inkling of what was awaiting her, even then, what could she do?

When the king sends messengers and says, you have to come with us. The king is seeking your presence. If she has any guilt, her guilt is being visible, being a woman, and being beautiful.

And the last time I checked, that wasn't something that you are guilty of. Notice also that though her identity and name is established in the account, and that in itself is very chilling because she was part of a family who David was very close to.

Her husband, Uriah, was one of his mighty men. Her father, Eliam, was one of his mighty men. These were men that he was close to who were loyal to him. And we simply need to note that and move on.

But though her identity and name is established, her name soon disappears from the account. She is simply the woman. There in verse 5, the woman conceived. The woman conceived.

[10 : 14] David has taken her personhood. She becomes a sex object in powerful and cruel hands. And so, not even her name is any more mentioned.

There's the language that is present, but there's also the language that is absent. There's no language of love or affection in this sexual encounter. I can't imagine many words were exchanged.

This was a case of wham, bam, and thank you, ma'am, but without the thank you. But there's also in the passage as we mount up the evidence that David and David alone is guilty of this act of sexual violence, of raping this woman.

You have in the account a contrast that is painted. In verse 4, we're provided with a somewhat intriguing detail. We have it in brackets in our version. It says, And just to be clear on this, this is before being summoned to the palace.

This isn't a woman who has been abused sexually and who feels dirty and has a shower. That's not what is being said. This happens before she is the victim of David's assault.

[11 : 26] She had purified herself from her uncleanness. This is a reference to the original bathing that David had witnessed, presumably. And the writer is explaining that Bathsheba was engaged in a ritual bathing as prescribed by the law of God for women during or at the end of their time of menstruation.

If you're interested in the details, they seem very bizarre to our eyes. We have them in Leviticus chapter 15. Now, as I say, these regulations do seem to us very strange.

But the key contrast that I want to stress is simple enough. That while David is disobeying God's law, lusting after a married woman, Bathsheba is carefully and faithfully seeking to obey God's law in the privacy of her own home, so she imagines.

But then finally, as we mount up this evidence that David took Bathsheba, he raped Bathsheba, you have the opinion of God.

And I don't think we're going to quibble with God's opinion. And this is the most significant piece of evidence that we have. What is God's opinion? Will we find God's opinion clearly expressed at the end of the chapter, chapter 11 and verse 27?

[12 : 45] Chapter 27, the very last sentence we read, But the thing David had done displeased the Lord. No mention of Bathsheba. This isn't a case of shared guilt.

David is the guilty party. The thing David had done displeased the Lord. But we find God's opinion even more eloquently expressed from the mouth of his prophet.

You see, in chapter 12, we read the beginning of the chapter. We have Nathan confronting David with this parable. Now, Nathan was God's prophet.

This wasn't just a story that Nathan thought was pretty clever to illustrate what David had done. This is God's prophet. He's speaking God's word. He's bringing God's word. He's bringing God's opinion to David through the parable.

And in Nathan's parable, who is Bathsheba represented by? Well, we've read the verses. And in verses 1 to 3, we have Bathsheba represented by one little ewe lamb.

[13 : 49] An innocent lamb. If there isn't a more eloquent picture of innocence, then I don't know what there could be. Bathsheba is a little lamb. That's how she's represented in the parable.

She is innocent. You also have the language that Nathan uses in accusing David. So, having told the parable, and David is burning with indignation, then, of course, Nathan challenges him.

And notice the language he uses, and it ties in with what we've already been seeing. In chapter 12, verses 9 and 10. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?

You struck down Uriah the Hittite with a sword. And then what does Nathan say? Indeed, it continues.

Indeed, it continues. It continues. It continues. When we notice the punishment that is announced for David.

[14 : 55] And the punishment that is announced follows the pattern of an eye for an eye. And that in itself helps us to work backwards from the punishment to establish what the original fault was.

In chapter 12 and verses 11 to 12. And it's very sordid language, but it's the language that we have here. This is what the Lord says. Out of your own household, I am going to bring calamity upon you before your very eyes.

I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you. And he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before Israel. And what's God saying?

God is saying, what you did will be done to you. Your wives will be raped. Why? Because you raped Bathsheba. David took Bathsheba.

He took her personhood. He violated her in this brutal manner. But of course, that's not all that he took.

[15 : 55] David takes Bathsheba's husband. Now, we know the story, but I want to just very quickly focus on Bathsheba's loss in the death of Uriah.

Bathsheba, of course, lost her husband. He was murdered by David. But she lost a husband who was, by every indication, a good man. He was a loyal man.

He was a man committed to his people. He was a man of integrity. And all of these things, of course, would have been reflected as a husband. And we can, I think, reasonably draw the conclusion that he would have been a good, loyal, faithful husband.

That's the husband she lost. That's the husband that was taken from her by David. And not only a good man, not only a man of integrity, but a husband who loved her.

Again, if it's legitimate to draw from the parable, and we have to be careful not to try and draw too much from a parable. But the language of the parable, when it speaks of the little ewe lamb and the owner of the little ewe lamb, it's very tender language.

[17:00] It says that the little lamb was like a daughter to him. The picture is of this lamb who is dearly loved by the poor man. And, of course, the poor man represents Uriah, a husband who dearly loved his wife, who dearly loved Bathsheba.

And this man who loved her is taken from her by David. And, of course, not only did he love her, but she loved him. We're told of her mourning at his death.

At the end of chapter 11, we have that information given to us. 2 Samuel chapter 11.

We read, when Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house. And the account continues. And there in these two verses, on two occasions, the word mourning is found.

But in the original, there are two different words. The word in verse 27, after the time of mourning, speaks of that formal time of mourning when a loved one or a close relative have died.

[18:09] It doesn't necessarily say much about the heart of the person. It's what you had to do. You had to mourn because your husband had died. But in verse 26, it's a different word that is used. When it says, she mourned for him, it's a word that is much more passionate.

It's a word that speaks of wailing and lamenting. And it reveals to us her love for the husband who had been taken from her. David takes her personhood, her dignity.

He takes her husband. He takes Bathsheba's son. The child conceived, even in such dark circumstances, is loved by Bathsheba. And we know that because, again, the text tells us of how she mourned his loss, revealing the love that she bore to the one she had carried in her womb those nine months and who had been born a son of father.

She loved that child. But that child is taken from her. Who is responsible for that? Well, David's responsible for that. The child dies as a direct result of David's sin.

David, the man of power, takes. He takes her personhood. He takes her husband. He takes her son. You almost wonder, is there anything left for Bathsheba? But in startling contrast to David, the Lord, the God of all power, gives.

[19:29] What does God give Bathsheba? Let me suggest one or two things that He gives. God gives Bathsheba a voice. There's a quiet dignity to the message delivered to David by Bathsheba.

She had been dispatched following David satisfying his sexual appetite. Go home. Go home. But we're told she conceived.

And she sends a message to David. And the message is simple. I am pregnant. And again, we've got to be careful not to speculate too much. But you almost wonder whether there's not a subtext there.

As Bathsheba thinks to herself, well, King David, you thought I could be used and abused and forgotten. But I'm still here.

And I have found my voice. I wonder if we could call this Bathsheba's hashtag me too moment. God gives Bathsheba a voice. But God also gives Bathsheba a family.

[20 : 31] He gives her a husband and a son. And let's start with a husband. Now, this is tough to get our heads around. Because her new husband is her rapist. And how can we even think of presenting this as an act of grace and generosity in the heart of God?

You might say this is rather an act of torture on the part of God. You've lost a husband. I'll give you a new husband. Here he is. You're a rapist. Is that grace? Is that the goodness of God?

But this is, of course, the power of God's grace. Because David is a man transformed. David is a man who acknowledges his sin. We've read that. Or I don't know if we did get to that point.

But in the chapter where Nathan rebukes David, David acknowledges his guilt. But not only does he acknowledge his guilt, he repents of his sin. And he is forgiven of his sin.

Psalms 51 speaks eloquently of the depth of his repentance, of the sincerity of his grief, of the wickedness that he has committed, but also of the wonder of God's forgiveness in David's life.

[21 : 39] Not for David. What we were thinking about this morning, those who are discovered, accused of sexual assault or guilt, who use as a line of defense, this does not reflect who I am.

David says, this does reflect who I am. That's the man I am. I'm a wicked man. And as a wicked man, I committed this wicked act. But God forgave his sin.

God forgave his sin. And he is a man transformed. He is a man after God's own heart. And this man transformed is able to love his new wife and son.

This son who was the product of this wicked act of sexual assault and how he loves this son. We know how he cried out to God that he would have mercy on his son.

Such was his love for his son. And amazingly, he also is presented to us as one who is able to love his new wife, to love Bathsheba.

[22 : 49] We read how he comforts her as her son dies. In verse 24 of chapter 12, then David comforted his wife Bathsheba.

And he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son and they named him Solomon. Even when we read that verse, it's a very striking contrast between the two sexual encounters between David and Bathsheba.

The first one marked by violence, coldness, merciless. And yet we have the second sexual encounter and it's marked by tenderness and love. You say, how can this be?

The rapist and his victim. And yet by the power of God's grace, this is what is happening. Bathsheba is given by God a new husband, a man of God, a man of integrity, a man who had been guilty of great wickedness, but a man who had repented of his sin and who had been forgiven of his sin.

And, you know, I've said it already, but I appreciate that the very idea that we can see God's grace in Bathsheba being granted David as her husband is very difficult. But I think it serves to, if you wish, scandalously highlight the power of God's restoring grace.

[24 : 06] And if we bring that to our present day, can we not draw this legitimate conclusion? If God could bring happiness and satisfaction into the marriage of David and Bathsheba, is any marriage beyond the storing reach of God's powerful grace?

God gives Bathsheba a husband. He gives her a son, Solomon. Solomon is born, not just any son. I don't suppose we should say that about any of our sons. They're not any son.

But in the case of Solomon, we have him described as a son loved by God. In chapter 12 and verse 25, we read, and because the Lord loved him, that's Solomon, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah, loved by the Lord.

A son destined for greatness. God gives Bathsheba. David had taken. He had taken her dignity. He had taken her husband. He'd taken her son. But God gives her.

He gives her a voice. He gives her a new family. He gives her a son. He gives her Solomon. And God gave Bathsheba a place of honor and service. Bathsheba rears her son in a manner that prepares and equipped him for his kingly duties.

[25 : 22] And can we not give some credit to Bathsheba for Solomon's desire for wisdom that he would later, of course, become famous for? But in later life, we have further evidence of God using Bathsheba for the fulfilling of his purposes.

In 1 Kings chapter 1 and verses 11 to 13, just very quickly notice an incident many years later in the life of Bathsheba and Solomon that I think is instructive or revealing.

In 1 Kings chapter 1, verses 11 and 13, let's just read those two or three verses. So, very quickly, the context is that Adonijah, a brother of Solomon, another son of David by another woman, is seeking to usurp the throne.

And Nathan the prophet, we know Nathan from the story we've already been considering, he, with Bathsheba, seek to frustrate this intention on the part of Adonijah.

And we read in verse 11 of chapter 1 of 1 Kings, then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king without our Lord's David knowing it?

[26 : 31] Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go into King David and say to him, My Lord the King, did you not swear to me by your servant? Surely Solomon, your son, shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.

Why then has Adonijah become king? And the account goes on. The point is that here you have Bathsheba placed by God in a circumstance where she can be the means to secure God's purposes being fulfilled with regard to the messianic line that Solomon would be king, as was the intention.

And you also have Bathsheba, I think, significantly listening to and obeying the voice of Nathan the prophet. And as she obeys Nathan, she's obeying God. God is speaking through the prophet.

And she listens to God's voice through the prophet and obeys his voice, which speaks also to her character and to her faith and to her piety. This isn't a woman manipulating things for her own ends, I don't think, as she's sometimes portrayed.

But as a woman seeking to do what is right. There are other little curious incidents that happen subsequent to this in these first couple of chapters that we'll leave uncommented on this evening.

[27 : 46] The point is that God gives Bathsheba a place of honor and service. But then the final thing that I want to just say is that God gives Bathsheba an honored place in his big story of redemption.

Bathsheba is brought in to the messianic line, granted a place in the genealogy of Messiah Jesus. She would be, she would be known and is known to this day as the mother of Messiah.

From her seat, the generations, of course, would pass one after the other. But in her line and from her seat, it would be born the Savior of the world, Jesus the Christ, the eternal Son of God who came into the world to save sinners and to save all kinds of sinners, to save abusers like David and to save the abused like Bathsheba.

I wonder if Bathsheba being present in the account and described as Uriah's wife, almost as if the writer, as if Matthew is wanting just to remind us of David's guilt, not calling her Bathsheba, but Uriah's wife.

I wonder if the reason for her being so prominent in that genealogy is to remind us of the power of God's grace to rescue and to restore not only the abused, but also the abuser, both the objects of God's powerful restoring grace.

[29 : 22] And if that is something God could do for David, if it's something that He could do and did for Bathsheba, is He not the same God who can do that for you and me?

What about you? Maybe you're guilty of abuse, abusing your power. There's grace sufficient for you. Maybe you're a victim of abuse.

You are within the reach of God's restoring grace. There is hope. You have a future. Restoration and healing is possible. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word.

We thank You that You are the God of all grace. We thank You that Your grace is powerful. It is grace that restores. It is grace that lifts up. We thank You that Your grace is generous.

You are a giving God. We as sinners are ever taking, ever grabbing, ever looking to accumulate. And yet, in contrast, we turn to You, the God who gives, the God who so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[30 : 35] We thank You that You are a giving God. We thank You that we have known much of Your generosity. We have received much from Your generous hands. We thank You for the reminder of the power of Your restoring grace, that we would be persuaded that You are indeed the God who can act and restore with that power today in our lives and in the lives of those that You place in our paths.

And so we thank You for those reminders. And we pray that we would ever live in the light of and grateful for Your powerful grace. And we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.