

Some of you in your later years may remember a television show called *Truth or Consequences* - which actually began as an American radio show in 1940. Originally hosted by Ralph Edward, it's best known host was Bob Barker, who took over a few years after it became a television show in 1950. The premise of the show was to mix the element quiz show with that of a game show with weird, silly stunts. On the show, contestants received roughly two seconds to answer an off-the-wall trivia question correctly before a buzzer sounded. If the contestant could not answer the "truth" part of the question, there would be "consequences" of performing some sort of embarrassing stunt. Right from the start, most contestants preferred to not answer the question or to answer the question wrong - in order to perform the stunt. In many broadcasts, the stunts on *Truth or Consequences* included a popular, but emotional, heart-rending surprise for a contestant, like the reunion with a long-lost relative or with an enlisted son or daughter returning from overseas military duty. One thing many people remember is that Bob Barker ended each episode by saying, "Hoping all of your consequences are happy ones."

Truth or consequences. The grammatical structure of that phrase suggests not all of our consequences will be happy ones – it's either *truth OR consequences*. In one sense that doesn't make sense in that *truth* is not the opposite of *consequences*. Truth is “a fact which is true in accordance with reality”– while consequences are “the results or effects of an action.” But in another sense the phrase *truth or consequences* *does* make sense - in that if we ignore or reject a fact about what is true in accordance with reality, the results and effects of our actions *will not be happy ones*. Truth is not something we are to take lightly. While at times truth might seem to be a delicate thing, truth can explode like a bomb. And while at times truth might seem to be a strong thing, that same truth can shatter on impact.

The reality about truth is that truth can never be changed, though its details might get so distorted one could end up with a conclusion which couldn't be farther from the truth. Trying to ask someone to tell you the consequences of the truth, is like trying to find the value of an irrational number, which has decimal numbers that never terminate nor repeat. This is especially true for the truth of the Word of God. Every action has its own consequences, and within the context of the truth of God's Word, those consequences will vary in scope and magnitude, far beyond our expectation, like an irrational number. The truth of God's Word can change hearts and save lives *or* it can harden hearts and destroy lives - depending on the attitude and our response to that truth. The truth of God's Word can make us indescribably happy and it can stun and numb us to the very core of our souls. The truth of God's Word is not about truth *or* consequences - but rather about truth *and* consequences – how we receive and respond to the truth of the God's Word, *and* the consequences (results/effects) of our actions.

We will see that in our text this morning as we continue in our series of sermons focused on the life of King David, in search of the depth of what God meant when He said: “*I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will*” (Acts 13:22). Today we stand in the context, in the shadow, of the tragic story of David's deadly, adulterous affair with Bathsheba we looked at last week in 2 Samuel 11. Here we saw David, who had been anointed by God to be the king of all Israel, who had reigned according to the truth of God's Word, neglected to continue to be a man after God's own heart. It's then David's spiritual life crumbled against the surge of unrestricted sexual passion, and he lay with another man's wife and she became pregnant. And after two attempts of trying to coerce Bathsheba's husband Uriah to unknowingly appear to be the father of Bathsheba's unborn baby in his stead - David orders Joab, the commander of the army of Israel to place Uriah in a place along the battle lines against the Ammonites that would endanger Uriah's life, and then ensure his demise by pulling his supporting soldiers back from the battle. Uriah is killed in battle and after Bathsheba's a week mourning over his death, David marries the widow Bathsheba and she bore him a son. And the last verse of 2 Samuel 11 tells us: “*But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord*” (2 Samuel 11:27). As we open our text for today, it's believed that about a year or so has passed since David and Bathsheba's baby was born.

And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" 2 Samuel 12:1-7a

When God sees sin and injustice in His people, He sends His prophets, His preachers, His pastors to make His truth known. One of the roles of a prophet, preacher, pastor is to call out evil on God's behalf. God had given David plenty of time to make things right, but he persisted in hiding his sins. Had he come to the Lord on his own, in sincere repentance, things might have been different later on. But finally, God sends Nathan, not with a message of blessing, but with a message of conviction. Nathan knew David wouldn't respond to simply being challenged, so he devises a strategy to get past David's defenses. He uses the same technique that Jesus will use one thousand years later. He tells a parable. The key phrase in this parable is in verse 4. The story recounts that the powerful man "*was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd.*" That phrase is literally translated "he spared his own flock." The powerful man spared his own flock, but he "*took the poor man's lamb.*" That word for "*took*" is the same word used to describe David's taking of Bathsheba. David's hears the story and he gets angry at the powerful man, to which Nathan says: "*You are the man!*" David is exposed. His righteous anger about this injustice now points to him. Nathan confronts David and invites him to see the truth about himself. But before David has a chance to respond, God confronts King David by speaking directly to him.

"Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" 2 Samuel 12:7b-12

God confronts David about his sin by first describing to David how God had treated him: "*I anointed ... I delivered ... I gave ... I gave ... I would add to you as much more.*" God has clearly treated David well beyond what he deserved. But David didn't respond in kind. David "*despised ... did what was evil ... struck down ... took ... and killed.*" God gave. David took. God delivered. David struck down. God was good to David. David was evil in return. God was telling David that there are consequences when we treat people this way. God was telling David that there are consequences when we respond to God in this way. The consequences for David would be that the "*sword*" would never depart from his family: the lives of four of his children will be destroyed by violence; evil will arise out of his own house when two of his sons try to steal his throne; and his wives will play a major role in the subsequent stories of rebellion and destruction. The truth of God's Word tells us that struggle, failure, broken relationships and death are the consequences of sin – and now David has to personally live with the consequences of his actions. Nathan has prophetically given David a perspective on what he is really like. God has spoken to him of the consequences and shown him the damage that his actions will cause - and then David responds.

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." 2 Samuel 12:13a

Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" and now David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan and God have confronted David and they have gotten through to David. The eyes of his heart have been opened and he accepts the invitation to take the steps into repentance. The best way to explain how this happened in David's heart is to look at the two Psalms David wrote during this time.

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Psalm 51:1-17

*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.
Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.
You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.
I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.
Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.
Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

Psalm 32:1-11

These two psalms reveal that David's repentance was the culmination of a painful process, climaxing in the confrontation of David by Nathan and the hearing of the truth of God's Word. David took his sin seriously. He confessed His guilt before God and he did not expect any of his good works to offset or reduce the guilt of his sin. David did not presume upon God's grace, expecting to be forgiven and to have his life spared. And his repentance resulted in a renewed joy in the presence and for service of God, and a commitment to lead and teach others to repent by turning from sin and turning to God.

And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die." Then Nathan went to his house. 2 Samuel 12:13-15a

The abruptness of this part of the story is shocking. It took twelve verses for Nathan to tell his parable, for David to react and for God to add his words to Nathan's rebuke. But then in rapid succession, David owns his mistake and immediately Nathan declares the forgiveness of God. How can the forgiveness of God be so easily granted? Does repentance lead so quickly to forgiveness? Yes! That's what makes this part of David's tragic story so beautiful. Repentance is not easy. But when you do it, forgiveness comes immediately. But notice that the forgiveness doesn't mean David gets away with anything. God doesn't remove all the consequences of his sin. We will read of David begging God to spare the child's life. But God did not. This would not be the last consequence of David's sin. But it would be the most obvious.

There are some who would argue it's not fair that a child should die because of the father's sin. And they would be right. It isn't fair. But that is the reality of sin. Sin is not fair. Sin kills without prejudice and without concern for what makes sense. Sin destroys. Our sinful actions wound each other. Most of the time it's the people around us that have to experience the consequences of our selfish attitudes, actions and responses. But we must not take that to mean that struggles, pains, sufferings and tragedies we've experienced are a result of God punishing us for our sin. Biblically speaking, that kind of a direct connection is far and away the exception rather than the rule. But it is true that sin always has consequences. Our world is broken. Life hurts. We repent and we are forgiven, but life is still hard. David was confronted by the truth. He repented of his sin and he faced the consequences of his actions.

And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm." But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." 2 Samuel 12:15b-23

After Nathan left David, God struck the child born to David and Bathsheba. We do not know what the illness was, but we do know that after seven days the child died - and we know that David spent those days fasting and praying for his child's life. We are told that when the child did die, his servants feared what would happen if they told David. But David did find out - and he got up off the ground and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went to the temple and worshiped God, and then went home and had dinner. This didn't set well with his servants; they expected David to mourn for the child after he died, instead of just going back to life as usual. After David's servants worked up the courage to ask the king how he could respond so calmly in knowing that his child was dead. David responded by telling them that the death of his child came as no surprise to him because it had already been foretold by Nathan and he accepted the child's death as God's final answer to his prayers for the child's life. While the child was alive, David fasted and prayed. But now the child is dead. And David found comfort in the death of the child because he was assured that, although the child could not return to be with him in this life, he would go to be with the child in the life after in heaven.

For what purpose did the David's child die? Well, the purpose for the death of his child was not to punish David *because* the appropriate punishment for David's sins under the law of Moses would have been his own death. This child's death was not punitive towards David as Nathan has not given David news of a reduced sentence, but of complete forgiveness - the guilt and punishment for his sins had been "*put away*" (2 Samuel 12:13). *What then was the purpose of the child's death?* Nathan speaks of this in 2 Samuel 12:14 when he tells David: "*Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.*" The phrase "*scorned the Lord*" literally means to "blaspheme God." A literal translation of the entire verse would read "because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." What this means is that the purpose for this child's death was meant to silence any blasphemy on the part of the "enemies of God." Lest anyone might wrongly conclude that the sovereign God of Israel was oblivious to David's sin in the breaking of God's law, God made it clear that *He would not wink at sin, even the sin of a man after His own heart.* The death of David's son was a warning and an object lesson to the entire world.

Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord. 2 Samuel 12:24-25

What an incredible act of God's mercy that David would listen to and respond to a rebuke from Nathan that changed his heart. It's incredible act of God's grace that David would repent from the horrific sins he committed in the way he did. But the most incredible part of this story is how God empowered David to move on from the death of his child to a birth of another. We see how God did so by the verbs that are attached to King David in verses 20-25: "*He arose ... he washed ... he anointed ... he changed ... he worshiped ... he ate ... he comforted ... he lay with ... he called his name Jedidiah.*" Out of the death of David's repentance comes a new life of a hopeful future. A baby has been born who has two names. Solomon means "peace" and "*Jedidiah*" means "beloved of God." The next chapter of this story is already beginning for David. Out of his sin, out of his repentance, out of his forgiveness comes new life.

The central message of our faith in Christ is *forgiveness*. This is what the death of Jesus on the cross accomplished for us. It's what we often boil the whole Gospel down to say: "Your sins are forgiven." Nathan came to David and told him, "*You are the man!*" God comes to us and tells you and I, "You are the woman! You are the man!" But then Jesus Christ, the Son of God of the family of David, stands before Pontius Pilate as Pilate says to the crowd, "*Behold the man!*" - and the crowd cries out: "*Crucify him!*" (John 19:5). And because they did, we are given forgiveness when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Sin is ten times uglier and more deadly than we think. But forgiveness is infinitely more beautiful and offers us much more joy than we could ever imagine.

Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and took the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters. Now then gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called by my name." So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah and fought against it and took it. And he took the crown of their king from his head. The weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone, and it was placed on David's head. And he brought out the spoil of the city, a very great amount. And he brought out the people who were in it and set them to labor with saws and iron picks and iron axes and made them toil at the brick kilns. And thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem. 2 Samuel 12:26-31

The tragic event of adultery, murder and death in King David's life began with David pampering himself at home, but it ends with him taking his rightful place on the battlefield, leading the nation to an important victory. It is encouraging to see that God was willing to use David again in spite of his sins. He had confessed and repented of his sins; God forgave him; now he could fight for the Lord again.

But a quick look into 2 Samuel 13 reminds us that even though we can repent and be forgiven and be of use to God again - the deadly consequences of our sin will remain here on earth. While our God is gracious to forgive when we confess our sins, He will not violate His own holiness by interfering with the tragic results of our sins. David continued to reap the sad harvest of his sins. He was told that the sword would never depart from his house. We see that truth at the beginning of 2 Samuel 13 where we read the dark story of Amnon, one of David's sons, as he sinned against his own sister, Tamar in the same way David initially sinned against Bathsheba. This then results in a hatred being born in the heart of Absalom, another of David's sons, against Amnon. As this bitter spirit of rebellion, evil and lust spreads between his two sons, David seems to be utterly helpless as both sons are simply following in the same footsteps of David's sins of passion. The end result of all this is Absalom's murder of Amnon – which then causes him to lead a rebellion against his father, with a spirit that reflects the character of Saul.

Galatians 6:7-8 says: *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”* The truth of the Word of God tells us there are consequences to sin. Even though we have seen King David recover from his sin by repenting of his sin and receiving God's forgiveness – it is still somewhat discouraging to see the extent to which David's sin continued to tarnish his life. But we need to remember that this story in King David's life is not really about King David. It's really about the one who would come from King David's family to help us all fully recover from our sins by sacrificing his life on a cross in our place for the forgiveness of our sins - so we might be redeemed and restored back into the relationship with God we were created for. David's story is really about Jesus. The story of the world is the story about Jesus. And so the story of David is helpful - not because we can follow in David's footsteps - but because he leads us to Jesus. The truth is we overestimate ourselves. And the truth is we are not as good as we think. But it is also true that we underestimate the depth of forgiveness that is offered to us through Jesus Christ. Yes, the truth is, there are consequences to sin. Which means we need to be broken. We need to face our sin. We need to repent. We need to receive the forgiveness that is offered to us through the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. And we need to forgive each other, as Christ has forgiven us, because sin destroys. Life is hard. God is good. Jesus saves. Amen!

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love. Last week I ended my sermon by telling the story Robert Robinson who wrote the hymn *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. I told you that Robinson had come to faith in Jesus Christ under George Whitefield's preaching in 1752 and he later became a Baptist pastor in Cambridge. Toward the end of his life he began to go through a number of prolonged spiritual trials and struggles. And one day during this period he was traveling by stagecoach. Another passenger, a lady and a total stranger, was going over some hymns, persistently referred to 'Come, Thou Fount' as one that had brought her immense blessing. As the carriage rolled forward the woman began to sing the words of the hymn. And when she sang: "Prone to wander Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love" Robinson asked the woman to stop singing. And I told you that she said, "Why would you not want to listen to such an inspiring hymn?" And I told you Robinson replied by saying, "Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago. I wrote those words and I've loved those words – but right now I am now drunk." But what I didn't tell you was Robert Robinson also said: "And I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings for God I then had!" To which the lady replied, "Sir, the 'streams of mercy' you wrote of *are still flowing*." Robert was so deeply touched by her words that he repented of his godless way of life. His fellowship with God was restored through the ministry of his own hymn. He joyfully served the Lord until he died. The truth of God's Word can change hearts and save lives or it can harden hearts and destroy lives - depending on the attitude and our response to that truth. The truth is there are consequences to sin. And the truth is God has provided a Savior to save us from our sin. Romans 6:23 tells us: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The truth is, not all of our consequences will be happy ones – but the consequence of following Jesus will be everlasting joy!

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