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RESPECT GRACE OR FACE DISGRACE!

Today's Text: 2 Sam., Chaps. 11-21; Rom. 6: 1-23

Extracts:

1. "And Nathan said to David, ...Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, *I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. ... 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.... Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house, because thou hast despised Me*" [2 Sam. 12: 7, 9, 10]
2. "What then? *Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness*" [Rom. 6: 15-16]

Kobe Bryant is a well-known and highly respected American basketball player. He is the star guard for the Los Angeles Lakers. At the age of 24, he has already helped the Lakers to win the NBA Championships three years in a row, 2000-2002. He was the Most Valuable Player at the 2002 All-Star game. It is, therefore, no surprise that he is sought after by advertisers, such as Nike, and he is already a multimillionaire. He is married and has a one year-old daughter. So, in many ways, he represents a role model for most young people. However, on 30 June 2003, the whole world was shocked to hear that Kobe had been charged with the sexual assault (rape) of a 19 year-old woman at a mountain lodge in Colorado where he had stayed for a knee operation. The woman worked there as a receptionist. A few days later, an unusually subdued Kobe appeared on television with his wife to admit that he had committed adultery with the said lady. Kobe's wife may have forgiven him. He may be lucky to escape imprisonment if he is not found guilty of rape. But his life from now on will be different. His larger-than-life image is on trial. He faces possible disgrace.

How many of us are in a similar situation right now? If you have not been caught, do not celebrate because "be sure your sin will find you out" [Num. 23: 23]. All it takes to fall is a slip. One story has it that a man who had been faithful to his wife for 20 years enjoyed a moment's encounter with another woman whom he had met at an international conference. Now, he has brought home to his innocent wife HIV/AIDS, death and disgrace. Another story is about a top business woman (a winner of several awards in entrepreneurship development) that has been caught cheating on her taxes and company records. She has brought shame to her family and gender. No one is safe! How can we hold on to the grace of God and avoid disgrace? That is the subject of today's lesson. David's affair with Bathsheba will be our case study.

1. It takes a slip to fall!

David was the man after God's own heart. We have so far followed his life story from his teenage years to his mid-thirties. From him, we have gained great insights into what it means to be God-led, to walk by faith. Clearly, he is a role model for believers. Recently, however, "trumours" [rumours that turn out to be true!] have started to fly around that the king is having an affair with a beautiful woman called Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. He has gone ahead to marry her soon after her husband was killed in battle.

First of all, we cannot believe it, because the king is supposed to lead the troops to war. What is he doing in the palace at this time of the year? That is a wicked rumour and we won't believe it. Let us check with our usually reliable sources from within the palace to know the truth of the matter. Here is our palace correspondent's report:

Truly, the king spends more time in the palace these days. Actually, he now sleeps during the day, quite unusual for a fugitive of some years back who used to use stones for his pillow! It was when he woke up one evening and was strolling on top of the palace that he saw beautiful Bathsheba washing herself [2 Sam. 11: 1-2]. Don't ask me how dared her to do that. After all, she did not know that a man was around. All men of fighting age (20 and above) were supposed to be out in the war front. At any rate, the king sent for her and lay with her. She got pregnant and the king got scared [vv. 3-5].

To cover up his misconduct, the Commander-in-Chief (the king) sent to General Joab to grant Private Uriah leave to come home. On his arrival, the king got him drunk and asked him to go and sleep with his wife. The king's hope was that if his plan worked, it could be claimed that the ensuing child was Uriah's, not David's. After all, in those days, there were no DNA testing facilities! But Uriah was more concerned about the war than lovemaking. So, he "slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house" [vv. 6-9]. For three nights, David tried every trick at his disposal to get Uriah to sleep with his wife and each time the king failed. Finally, he gave Uriah a death warrant to deliver to Joab, which read, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." Poor Uriah, he faithfully carried the letter to his general who in turn executed it faithfully. Uriah was killed in battle as expected. Poor Bathsheba, she mourned for her husband when she heard of his death, not knowing the role played by her lover. Now alone and lonely but heavy with child, she could not turn down the king's offer to marry him [vv. 14-27].

We are all dumbfounded. David of all people? Adultery, then murder? Is this not the man who wrote most of the psalms that we sing or use in our prayers and worship? The events must have developed over several months. Was he still saying his daily prayers? Was he backslidden? What got into his head?

Before, we go into that fit of self-righteousness, let us remind ourselves that we are worse! How do we predispose ourselves to slip into similar circumstances? Here are some examples:

a) *When we get complacent*

Soon after a major victory, we tend to want to rest first before embarking on the next challenge. That is when we become vulnerable. Since President Bush declared the Iraqi war over, more American troops have been killed there than during the war itself. David relaxed soon after assuming control over the whole of Israel and no longer led troops to battle. He began to sleep in the daytime and turned lazy. That predisposed him to the temptation.

b) *When we entertain temptation*

We can never avoid temptation. However, we run into trouble when we buy a front-seat ticket to be entertained by temptation! David “saw a woman washing herself, *and the woman was very beautiful to look upon*” [2 Sam. 11: 2]. It took more than one glance for him to draw the conclusion that the woman was beautiful. David’s lust for her had been awakened! In the words of Jesus, “whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her *hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*” [Matt. 5: 28].

c) *When we try to bury the evidence*

We think we can contain the damage that our sin has brought about. A Catholic bishop in a European country paid a woman to keep quiet over their long-standing affair that had produced a son. After almost 20 years, the secret became public knowledge. David tried to pin Bathsheba’s pregnancy on her husband, Uriah. When that failed, he got him killed in battle and married his widow. What a generous man the king was, to marry a woman carrying her dead husband’s child! So, he thought until God blew it open!

2. But a fall can lead to multiple injuries!

Now, back to our palace correspondent. His last report left us very angry that our beloved king had become involved in things that we had thought were beyond him. We know that this man loves women and he acquires them like trophies. When he was anointed king over Judah some eight years back, he came with two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail [2 Sam. 2: 2]. Then, he brought back his estranged first wife, Michal, Saul's daughter, who had remarried Phatiel [2 Sam. 3: 13-16]. As soon as he was confirmed king over all of Israel, "David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem" [2 Sam. 5: 13]. He even inherited the late Saul's wives [2 Sam. 12:8]. In spite of all these, David has taken the wife of a poor man, after organizing his death. We cannot take on the king face-to-face because he is also our judge. But, if there is God in heaven and David has told us so much about Him, this injustice cannot stand. We hear that He is not a respecter of persons [Acts 10: 34]. Let us hear more from the palace correspondent:

*As soon as the king thought that he had successfully covered up his sins, the prophet Nathan brought him word from God. The word was hard and harsh because the king went down on his knees immediately and prayed for a long time. The part of it that I can recollect said, "**Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies...For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me**" and so on [Ps. 51: 1-19].*

Under the Law of Moses, adulterers are put to death [Lev. 20:10]. But God accepted the king's repentance and spared his life [2 Sam. 12:13]. However, "because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," the Lord passed the following judgment: the sword shall never depart from David's house; God will raise evil out of David's house; and David will be publicly disgraced. God's exact words were "I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun" [vv. 7-14].

What followed has shocked most of us. Here are some of the calamities that befell our beloved king, his family and his people as a result of God's judgment. *In spite of David's repentance:*

- i. The son that was born out of the adulterous affair with Bathsheba died [vv. 15-18]
- ii. David's son, Amnon, raped and defiled his half-sister, Tamar [2 Sam. 13: 1-20]
- iii. Absalom murdered Amnon to avenge the defilement of his sister, Tamar, and was sent into exile [vv. 21-36]
- iv. Following the king's subtle intercession, his favourite son, Absalom, was brought back from exile. However, he was later to stage a rebellion, which sent David into exile in his old age. On his

way into exile, David was deserted by friends and jeered by foes [2 Sam. 15: 7-37; 2 Sam. 16: 1-14]

- v. In the sight of all the people, Absalom spread a tent on top of his father's house and slept with the ten concubines that David had left behind [2 Sam. 16: 15-22]
- vi. Following the murder of Absalom by Joab and his troops, a feat that David's reaction turned into a day of mourning [2 Sam. 19: 1-7], David was restored but he was no longer his old confident self [2 Sam. 20: 1-26]. He almost got killed in the battle against the Philistines, that his men had to tell him, "Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel" [2 Sam. 21: 15-17].
- vii. Even the sins of Saul against the Gibeonites were visited on David and his kingdom in the form of famine that lasted for three years [2 Sam. 21: 1-14].

3. Lessons

The following lessons can easily be noted:

- a) *Never forget that God is also a Judge!*

The Bible says that God is love [1 Jn 4: 16], but it also says that He is a consuming fire [Heb. 12: 29]! Paul summarizes these seemingly contradictory attributes of God this way: "Behold therefore the *goodness* and *severity* of God: on them which fell, severity, but toward thee, *goodness if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou shalt also be cut off*" [Rom. 11: 22].

Now, to whom much is given, much is expected. If Kobe Bryant were an unknown local Colorado boy, the local press would not report his adultery. However, as a basketball superstar, whatever he said or did would impact on a great number of impressionable people. That is somebody who worked hard for his stardom. Born again Christians, on the other hand, are superstars whom God has so declared on account of the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary, not because of their personal efforts. The *grace* may be free to us but it cost God His only begotten Son. Do we then expect Him to treat us with kid gloves when we disrespect or abuse that grace by *willfully continuing in sin*?

God looks at the heart. When we sin out of ignorance or unintentionally and confess our sins, He will forgive us and set us free, just as an earthly judge would set free a remorseful wife who killed her abusive husband out of self-defence. Paul was a "blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious" but in his own words, "I obtained mercy *because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*" [1 Tim. 1: 13]. David, on the other hand, plotted and carefully

executed his adultery and murder. It was willful and continuous. Therefore, even though God forgave David, following his confession, God still meted out the due punishment, just as an earthly judge would spare the life of a repentant murderer but still sentence him/her to long-term or life imprisonment.

b) *If you want God to forget your sinful past, stop reminding Him!*

We all came to Christ from different sin-filled routes. Having washed us clean in His blood, we are all now a chosen people, a royal priesthood. God is proud of us, the same way He boasted about Job to Satan [**Job 1: 8**]. The Holy Spirit now dwells in us and we have become the temples of the living God. In such circumstances, God no longer remembers our sinful past [**Jer. 31: 34**]. However, when we *willfully sin* against Him thereafter, we are reopening old wounds! That is when we remind God that we were once dogs and pigs [**2 Pet. 2: 20-22**]! After the adultery and murder, God reminded David of his past low estate and who was responsible for his promotion [**2 Sam. 12: 7-8**]. Each time the children of Israel rebelled against God, He always reminded them what they were in Egypt [**Num. 14: 20-22**]. He may forgive you for polluting His temple, but you will have some cleaning to do this time! That is what we call *restitution*.

4. Conclusion

Somebody has said that if a public utility company supplied the air we breathe, many of us could not afford enough supply for a few minutes. Yet, God has given it to us freely for as long as we live but do you appreciate it? Much more, He has purchased eternal salvation with the blood of Jesus and given it to us on a platter of gold. All that you are required to do is to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, *holy, acceptable unto God*, which is your reasonable service” [**Rom. 12: 1**]; that having been bought with a price, that is, the blood of Jesus, you should “therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s “ [**1 Cor. 6: 20**].

The battle against temptation has no ceasefire! Nevertheless, Satan will only use the weapons that you have made available to him. Those weapons are the *things that you love most*, such as money, sex, power, leisure, anger, unforgiving spirit, backbiting, waywardness, disrespect, envy, etc. For every temptation that you succumb to, you have trashed God’s grace. In the words of George Bernard Shaw, those who rob Peter to pay Paul can always count on Paul’s support. You trash God’s grace, you get disgraced.

Therefore, be careful. All it takes to fall is a little slip. Respect God’s grace over your life. Turn away from disgrace and shame.