

Anatomy of Unfaithfulness 2 Samuel 11

Tim Anderson 13/1/2018

We're doing a sermon series on sex and marriage.

We started looking at marriage in the creation.

Marriage created by God for companionship and kids.

"This is now flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone ..."

"And the two will become one flesh."

We followed that by looking at how marriage has been spoiled.

Instead of unity we have a power struggle.

"Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."

Our response to that as Christians

is to strive for the unity that was God's design.

But recognising that the brokenness of the fall will be our experience.

We can try to live out that one flesh unity,

but we will never completely eliminate the power struggle.

I remember having dinner with an older couple.

They'd been married for 50 years.

And the husband was forthrightly proclaiming to me

that they'd never had a fight in 50 years of marriage.

And while he was talking, but so that he couldn't see,

his wife was rolling her eyes to me.

Her eyes were calling out,

"He believes what he is saying,

but it's not true."

Today we are looking at the great destroyer of marriages.

What is the great destroyer of marriages?

It's not toilet seats being left up.

It's not failure to remember the wedding anniversary.

It's unfaithfulness.

Even in our world,

where all of the historic norms about sexuality

are constantly challenged,

unfaithfulness is still the number one killer of marriages.

People can say that God's standards of faithfulness are outdated.

They are the product of another era.

That's the rhetoric.

But the reality is that unfaithfulness still destroys marriages.

Even those people

who have openly jettisoned belief in sexual faithfulness,

those who have agreements with their marriage partner,

that we are both free to sleep around,

in many instances have found that freedom

to be destructive to their marriage.

And even those people who want to have long term relationships

that aren't sealed by the promises of marriage

find that unfaithfulness is a destroyer of their relationships.

Why is it that God wants faithfulness?

Well there are a number of reasons.

Stable relationships make for stable families.

Stable families are good for children.

Faithfulness in relationships avoids jealousy, betrayal and hurt.

God would like to save us the pain of jealousy, betrayal and hurt.

Those are sensible, practical reasons why God wants us to be faithful.

But I want to share with you another reason.

This one is more abstract.

God actually pictures human marriage

as a copy of his relationship with his people.

God views himself as the husband and his people as the wife.

God wants his people to be faithful to him.

God promises to always be faithful to them.

And God wants our relationships

to be a picture of his relationship with us.

Here's a sample verse from Jer 3:1.

It shows the kind of thing I'm talking about.

"If a man divorces his wife

and she leaves him and marries another man,

should he return to her again?

Would not the land be completely defiled?

But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers -

would you now return to me?

declares the Lord."

Jeremiah chapter 3 is not a prophecy

against the immoral living of the Israelites.

It's about their forsaking the Lord to worship other gods.

They have worshipped idols of wood and stone.

But the picture that God uses is of an unfaithful marriage.

God wants our marriages to be faithful as a picture of his faithfulness.

Well today we are looking at an example where things went wrong.

Wrong in a big way,

and wrong in a high profile servant of God.

King David was described as a man after God's own heart.

God was looking for a replacement for King Saul,

in the book of Acts 13:22 it says about David,

"After removing Saul,

God made David their king.

God testified concerning him:

'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart;

he will do everything I want him to do.'"

But even the man after God's own heart was found unfaithful.

We have the story in 2 Samuel 11.

It's a cautionary tale for us.

If this can happen to the man after God's own heart,

take care of yourself.

Verse 1 tells us,

It happened in spring

at the time when kings go off to war.

And this is already ringing warning bells for us.

Winter is over.

It's now warm enough to camp out in the open with your army.

So that is when the kings took their armies off to war.

And what is David?

He's a king.

And his army has gone off to war.

And he has stayed home.

He's missing in action.

He's derelict in his duty.

The reproach is heard in the last sentence.

"But David remained in Jerusalem."

There's a saying,

"idle hands are the devil's workshop."

David was sitting at home with nothing to do.

He probably already had a guilty conscience about it.

Sitting around with time on your hands and a guilty conscience.

It's not a good start.

The guilty conscience takes away your desire to please God because you know that you are already failing him.

David's situation is step number one towards moral failure.

If you want to avoid moral failure,

avoid putting yourself in situations

where you have nothing productive to do

and a guilty conscience clouding your judgement.

Step 2 towards moral failure occurs

when you are not just bored and twiddling your thumbs

but you decide to do something about it.

Now David already had at least two wives.

He was married to both Abigail,

who had been Nabal's wife and to Michal the daughter of King Saul.

But one evening David got up from his bed and took a walk on the roof.

Now the passage doesn't tell us why he did that.

Was his conscience getting to him because he wasn't away at the war?

Or had he already been tempted towards adultery in his heart.

You see, the king's palace was the tallest building in the city.

And it had a good view over the roofs of the other buildings.

And people washed on their roofs.

They didn't have pipes and taps in their houses,

so that made it easy to get rid of the dirty water when you'd finished.

So did David go up onto the roof of the palace

because he was intent on enjoying the view?

We don't know.

But when he saw something he shouldn't have been watching,

he didn't avert his eyes.

He feasted his eyes.

He sent someone to find out about the woman he saw.

Notice that there are a number of bad decisions there.

He was on the palace roof,

which may or may not have been with the intent to perv.

But whether or not the first look was intentional,

the second look definitely was.

That was a bad decision.

Then there was the bad decision to follow it up.

He decided to send for someone to find out about her.

Most people would be ashamed

to put their bad thoughts out into the open like that.

What is the person who David is questioning going to think?

Here is my king who has two wives already

enquiring about another pretty woman he's spied out.

Forget actually doing the right thing in God's eyes,

that's a lofty ambition,

David is risking his reputation amongst others here.

Sure he could enquire discretely,

but people are going to put two and two together.

But that is one of the dangers of being king.

People are going to look the other way

if you choose to do the wrong thing

because you have the power to make them regret it if they don't.

If you think about the string #metoo revelations in the last year or so,

the common thread is the powerful position the man is in:

Harvey Weinstein, Craig McLaughlin, star footy players,

even ministers.

Power makes people think they can get away with stuff.

And that is a great spiritual danger.

You might be able to get away with stuff on earth,

but you can't sneak one past the Lord Almighty.

David made a bad decision to stay home when his men were fighting.

David made the bad decision

to take a second look when he saw the beautiful woman.

He made the bad decision to find out about the woman.

Fourth bad decision,  
when he was told that she was a married woman,  
he decided that he would sleep with her anyway.  
That's the decision to be unfaithful.  
And can you see it doesn't come out of the blue.  
It's in the middle of a string of bad decisions.  
Let me reiterate what I said earlier.  
God values faithfulness.  
He values promise keeping.  
He keeps all his promises.  
He wants his people to keep their promises.  
Bathsheba had promised that faithfulness to her husband.  
David caused her to break that trust.  
Was she a reluctant participant  
who couldn't see a way to say 'No' to the king?  
Was she a willing participant  
who was quite happy to trade up from an ordinary bloke to a king?  
We don't know.  
The Bible doesn't say.  
The Bible focuses in on David's unfaithfulness,  
because David was God's chosen king.  
He was expected to model God's faithfulness to the people.  
And he failed big time.

Four bad decisions.  
But it didn't stop there.  
And it rarely does.  
People who stuff up in a big way  
often compound their initial bad decisions  
by trying to cover their tracks.  
David though he could get away with it.  
But then Bathsheba sent him some unwelcome news.  
She was pregnant.  
There was no question that he was the father.  
Her husband was away at the war,  
remember the one that David should have been leading his men at.  
Bathsheba had just finished her period when David invited her around.

There was no question she was already pregnant before their affair.  
So David should have just manned up and taken responsibility, right?  
God expects his chosen leaders to take responsibility.

But David chose not to do that.

He chose to try to cover his tracks.

First of all, he invited Bathsheba's husband Uriah home from the war.  
David was just after an update on how the war was going.

He got his update

and sent Uriah to have a night at home  
before he went back to the war.

He sent him some fine food and wine as well,  
so that he could have a lovely evening with his wife,  
and provide David with an alibi when the baby was born.

But Uriah didn't go home!

He slept with the servants.

Why not?

Because he felt a duty of loyalty to his comrades in arms  
that he had left back on the battlefield.

How could he go and enjoy some quality time with his wife,  
when his mates were risking their lives?

It just didn't seem right to him.

And the contrast with David couldn't be stronger.

David hadn't even gone into battle at all.

And he was the king, the leader of his men.

Forget any 21C ideas about political leaders staying home.

In those days, the kings lead their armies in person.

Uriah on the other hand was not even an Israelite.

He was a Hittite.

There was less reason for him to feel a great debt of loyalty to Israel  
than anyone else in the army.

But he wouldn't even enjoy a day off  
when it was offered to him by the king.

And as you read the story,

you can't help but feel

that God had a hand in frustrating David's efforts to cover his tracks.

Just so we don't forget

that everything will be exposed on judgement day.

Well David had another opportunity right there to decide not to compound his earlier mistakes. He could have called Uriah in for a meeting. "Uriah, your faithfulness to the nation of Israel has pricked my conscience. I have been deeply unfaithful. Not only as commander in chief of the army, but also I have sinned against you personally. I slept with your wife, and she is pregnant. I wanted to cover my tracks by getting you to spend an evening with her. But your loyalty to your comrades has spoiled my plan. Please accept my humble apology and allow me to try to make amends." That would have been the right thing to do. But David did the exact opposite. He instructed his military commander to engineer a situation where Uriah would be killed and David could take Bathsheba as his wife. And that's what happened. But don't think that David got away with it. The last verse of our reading says, "The thing David had done displeased the Lord." In the next chapter, the prophet Nathan brings a judgement from God on King David. The baby born to Bathsheba dies, and three of David's grown sons die violently, in fulfillment of Nathan's words to David, "The sword will never depart from your house."

Why doesn't God stop King David?  
God is there in the background  
frustrating David's efforts to cover his tracks,  
why doesn't he stop him?  
God is there speaking through the prophet Nathan  
doling out the punishment,

why doesn't God stop him?

Why doesn't he bring him to his senses  
before he commits adultery and murder?

Well in a sense the question is not much different to asking  
'Why didn't God stop Adam and Eve eating the fruit?'

He wants people to love him by choice.

He hasn't made us robots.

But this story of King David adds something to that.

God sometimes uses our disobedience to break our spirits,  
to take away our sinful pride

in our ability to get there under our own steam.

We need to know

that we can't be right in God's sight without his mercy.

And sometimes we need our noses rubbed in our sin  
to fully appreciate our need for mercy.

David's behaviour in the next chapter is full of contrition.

And the psalm he wrote after this encounter, psalm 51,  
is a beautiful cry to God for forgiveness.

I've known a number of people

who would never have become Christians,

if they didn't have to face the consequences of falling into sin.

It was only in their humiliation that they could reach out for a saviour.

What is a Christian response to unfaithfulness?

If you are the person who has been unfaithful,  
the right response is to confess your sins and repent.

To take the consequences of your actions.

It doesn't matter if it was 30 years ago

and you've moved on and the other person has moved on.

The right response is to confess your sins

both to God and the person whose trust you have broken.

Sometimes that is more than one person,

your spouse and your children.

I've heard of Christian people

who have been unfaithful

and their spouse has found it out and left them.

But they continue to deny it.

They won't even admit it to their former spouse let alone their children.  
You can't have true repentance  
without openly acknowledging what you've done.  
Remember how God frustrated David's efforts to cover his tracks.  
Sometimes God allows people to succeed in covering their tracks.  
But it's never spiritually helpful for them.  
That's true about all sin.  
But sexual sins have such a large shame attached to them  
that the temptation to keep them hidden is greater.

I want to finish the sermon focused on God.  
Why does God want us to be faithful?  
Because God is a faithful God.  
Even if you are not tempted towards sexual infidelity,  
it's good to know and reflect on God's faithfulness.  
He doesn't find some other people to love  
when we fail him.  
And we all fail him in many ways.  
He sticks with us.  
He is ready to forgive even the worst sinner  
who truly and humbly repents.  
If he can forgive the adulterous and murderous David,  
he can forgive whatever it is that you have done.  
God is incredibly, remarkable gracious  
when people honestly and humbly come before him in repentance.