




The King Who Needs a Savior

THEOLOGICAL THEME: All sin is ultimately directed toward God.

Growing up, I remember a country preacher who used to come to our youth group and warn us about the dangers of sin. One of his favorite tactics was to point his finger at us and shout, “Sin ain’t fun!” I never corrected him, but even at the time I thought, “Well, if sin ain’t fun, you ain’t doing it right.”

Let’s be honest: sin can be pleasing. We don’t rush toward sin because it’s painful but because it’s so promising. Sin begins with a thrill, with a rush. But even though sin starts off with the excitement of endless possibility, it *always* leads to the same place: brokenness, agony, disappointment, and despair.

 Consider the sin of losing your temper and lashing out at someone with words. What is sin’s promise to you in this situation? What is the appeal in that moment?



Voices from Church History

“In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once, a secret, smouldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames...At this moment God is quite unreal to us... Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God...The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness.”¹

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906-1945)

Date of My Bible Study: _____

In this session we see how King David fell into sin and experienced all of its ugly consequences. In David we see sin's capacity to enslave us and to motivate us to cover it up. But we also see the possibility of renewal through confession. As believers, we must see all of our sin as an offense toward God and rely on the forgiveness available to us through the sacrifice of God's Son in order to be restored.

1. The King's Captivity to Sin (2 Sam. 11:1-5)

¹ In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. ³ And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

⁴ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

The first thing we should note about how King David fell into captivity to sin is that this temptation came after he had received the blessing of God. At this point in the biblical narrative, the kingdom of Israel is firmly established. David is at the height of his popularity. In the preceding chapters, David emerged as the victor of many battles.

Does it surprise you that David's sin came after his receiving so much blessing? We tend to think that adversity is what precedes sinful behavior, as if sin becomes merely an escape from reality. But blessing can be just as dangerous because we forget just how dependent we are on God (see Prov. 30:8-9).



What are the blessings God has provided you that are most likely to make you forget your dependence on God, if you let them?

A second element of David's temptation is that he was disengaged from his work. The king had just sent Joab and the whole army out to battle. But David stayed back. David the warrior had become David the vacationer, and his lack of engagement made him susceptible to cheap thrills.

The third element of this temptation is that David was in the place where he could be tempted. It is far easier to avoid temptation than it is to resist sin. Don't get me wrong: resisting sin is important, immensely so. We must cultivate a habit of coming face to face with temptation and still resisting sin. But the world throws enough temptation our way; do we really need to go seek out more of it?



What are the most vulnerable times and places where people are most likely to face temptation?

David's dark road continued. His descent into sin wasn't immediate, and even here, we see how he was given a chance to escape. "Isn't this Eliam's daughter?" someone told him. "Isn't that Uriah's wife?" Why these details? This is the author pointing out to us—even if David didn't quite catch it—that Bathsheba was someone's wife, someone's daughter.

Sin hurts people. It affects someone's mother, daughter, son—even if that someone is just you. God's rules, we have to remember, are never arbitrary. They are given to us for our good, to show us the most life-giving way of interacting with others. God doesn't want to keep us from sinning because He's out to ruin our fun but because He knows how deeply it will wound us. Sin disintegrates. Sin wounds. Every time. Without fail.



Voices from Church History

"The sin of immorality is not one we are instructed to fight. It is one we have been told to flee. Run from that compromising situation. Saturate that place with your absence."²

—Adrian Rogers (1931–2005)

2. The King's Cover-Up of Sin (2 Sam. 11:6-17,26-27)

⁶ So David sent word to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” And Uriah went out of the king’s house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰ When they told David, “Uriah did not go down to his house,” David said to Uriah, “Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?” ¹¹ Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.” ¹² Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵ In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.” ¹⁶ And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. ¹⁷ And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died.

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²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

As the story unfolds, we see David at his most ingenious—and at his most devious—as he schemed and hatched plans in order to hide his sin.

Plans A and B for tricking Uriah into thinking the baby was his didn’t work. So David started Plan C. He wrote a note to Joab that told him to put Uriah in the front of the battle and to abandon him. It was a death sentence for Uriah, *and Uriah himself carried it to Joab*. In the end, David’s plan succeeded. Uriah died in battle, and it looked like David was going to get away with it.

But then comes the chilling end to the chapter: “The thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Sam. 11:27). No one else may have seen what truly happened. David may have convinced himself that it was all behind him. But God’s eyes were watching. They always are.

Proverbs 28:13

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”



When have you had to cover up your own wrongdoing? How did events spiral out of control?

David’s life from this point forward began to unravel. His family started to fall apart. His newborn son with Bathsheba died, and his grown children rebelled against him. What does this show us but that sin has an enormous capacity to destroy?

Sin can always be forgiven. As we will see in a moment, David came to God and received healing for what he had done. But we can’t always undo the damage caused when we freely walk into sin. Sin is a plague—by its very nature, it destroys. The whispers of sin that promise joy are lies, and the end of that road is disaster.



What are some consequences you have experienced because of your own sin?



What are some consequences others have experienced because of your sin?

3. The King's Confession of Sin (Ps. 51:1-13)

Fortunately for David, God chose to expose what David had covered up. He sent the prophet Nathan to remind David that although he thought he had gotten away with everything, God wouldn't let it end there. And in a moment of profound humility, David finally came clean. The result was one of the most beautiful and exemplary songs in Scripture—Psalm 51. In this psalm, David shows us the keys to gospel-centered repentance and confession.


- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*
- ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*
- ⁴ 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.*
- ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*
- ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.*
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.*
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*
- ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.*
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*



What stands out to you as the necessary components of confession based on Psalm 51?

*First, look at how gospel-centered repentance makes its sole hope the mercy of God. David began precisely where he should, by centering on God's grace. He prayed "according to your steadfast love" and "according to your abundant mercy." This is actually a rather risky thing to say. What if God decides *not* to be merciful? Shouldn't we make our case with God first? At least, this is how many of us approach God. But that's not repentance. Repentance begins where blame-shifting, bargaining, and rationalizing end.*

Second, gospel-centered repentance owns the truth that the sin we commit is deeply inherent to who we are. When we're caught in our sin, our natural inclination is to explain it away: "I'm not really as bad as all that," we want to say. "It was just a moment of weakness." But David went the complete opposite direction: "I know my transgressions," he said. "These sins weren't a mistake I made; they're at the core of who I am." In verse 5, he took this about as far as it could go: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." In other words, "Hey, you think I'm bad? You don't know the half of it. This sin stuff? It's in my blood." Each one of us is born a rebel against authority—especially God's authority.

 What are some ways we "water down" repentance by bargaining with God or by explaining away our mistakes?

 How does true repentance differ from a watered-down version?

Third, gospel-centered repentance is directed first toward God. "Against you, you only, have I sinned," David said (v. 4). Really? What about Bathsheba? Or Uriah? On the face of it, this doesn't make sense, but it's actually the heart of David's entire prayer.

All of our sin starts as a dissolution in our relationship with God. It begins as we grow dissatisfied with what God has given us, as we doubt His goodness toward us. So we start to feel God's boundaries as restrictive, not life-giving. What this means is that the way to deal with sin in our lives isn't merely to suppress the sin; it's to increase our delight in God so that we love Him more than we love the sin.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

37. Sin as Rebellion

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clinched fist toward the One who made us.

Many of us don't realize how large and majestic is our God. But think, the bloody cross was the price for our sin. Jesus didn't have to die because of what we did to each other but because of what we did to God. He took you and me, His enemies, and brought us close, calling us His friends. That should change how we think of sin against God—not merely as treason against a mighty king but as a betrayal of a close friend's trust. Sin should upset us not just because of its consequences but because of what our sin has done to God; otherwise, our repentance will only be a smokescreen.

Voices from the Church

"The victorious Christian life is not the sinless life, but the repentant life."³

—Trevin Wax



What happens when we minimize the severity of our rebellion against God?

Conclusion

Here's what is so beautiful about the gospel. David was crying out to God, asking God to purge *him* and wash *him*. But he also knew how deep his sin was. To be truly purged, truly cleansed, he would need to pay far more than he had to give. The penalty for his sin—and ours—was death. But in the gospel, God in Christ takes the penalty of our sin upon Himself on the cross. The cross is God's promise to us that there is no sin so heinous, no heart so wicked, that God cannot cleanse it. And the resurrection is God's promise that there is no situation so dead that He cannot renew and restore it.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Even David, the greatest of Israel's kings and a man after God's own heart, was a sinner in need of redemption. In the story of David, we recognize that all of us need forgiveness through the sacrifice of the perfect King who would take upon Himself the punishment our sins deserve.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to be transparent about our sin and to live in repentance so that others will know there is hope for forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

1. What steps will you take to avoid putting yourself in places of temptation?

2. How might a life of repentance toward both God and others put the gospel on display and open doors for conversations about Christ?

3. How should the truth that all sin is ultimately directed toward God impact our mission to call people to repentance and faith in Jesus?
