

One of our summer small groups has been studying Psalm 23. We have been nourished by the joy that comes from seeing the LORD provide green pastures even in the darkest days of unbelief, affliction, and persecution. What a difference between our King Jesus and His rule over our lives compared to the many fallible kings, false priests, and false shepherds showcased in the Old Testament. Even the best of these, such as the Psalm-singer David, fell far short of the true definition of godly shepherding and kingship which Christ epitomizes.

Monday: Read Psalm 23:1-3 & 2 Samuel 12:1-23

Rebuking and Restoring

The reclaiming, restoring, and gentle leading of lost and wandering sheep is a divine skill. It is not sinless, cute, and pure white lambs that Christ Jesus leads to still waters and green pastures as the Good Shepherd. All through Scripture, the LORD holds out His hands to His people in their sin, urging them to repent and saying to them, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” His paths of righteousness are often spurned by the sheep He loves so much (Psalm 23:3).

Sadly, the Old Testament confirms how hardened the sheep of Israel became, refusing to follow the Shepherd’s voice. Even the author of Psalm 23 knew what it was to wander and to abuse the sheep under his care. As Nathan the prophet’s parable revealed to David, “He was the man.” He stole another man’s prized lamb when he took Bathsheba as his own.

Meditate and Pray: Would you pray for your elders to be faithful when they must obey God’s charge to confront sin and rescue hurt sheep from such abuse? Ask the LORD by His Spirit to convict, heal, forgive, and restore even as He did for David. We need the same level of grace in our churches today!

Tues/Weds: Read Psalm 23:1-3 & 2 Samuel 11

Sin, Put Away

David’s sin of adultery was the highest crime a shepherd of God’s people could commit. The LORD had been so generous toward David – raising him to be King of Israel, giving him his master Saul’s house and retinue, defeating his enemies through Israel’s armies, moving the hearts of Israel to trust him. They were like willing lambs under his royal rule. Then he inexplicably took one of those lambs, destroyed her life by taking her from her husband, and killed her husband as well. Instead of ruling Israel generously and being a faithful shepherd to them, he abused his position of power, coveted Bathsheba, and robbed Uriah the Hittite, a simple, faithful soldier. Then, desperate to cover up his crime, he placed Uriah on the front lines and colluded with Joab to ensure that he would die.

All this lies behind the final condemnation of David in his adultery in 2 Samuel 12:7-13:

Nathan said to David, “You are the man! 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.’” David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.

How stunning that David was spared by the LORD after this terrible sin. God’s Law required death by stoning for the sin of adultery. However, God spared this shepherd-king by sending *His own precious Son* to die and thereby restore what He (the Christ) had not stolen. David destroyed his own family (as well as the family of Bathsheba) by his sin – but Christ paid the price by being willingly torn from *His own Heavenly family* and becoming sin on the Cross for David and for us. It was only by the life of that Lamb that David’s spiritual standing (as justified and forgiven in God’s sight) could be restored. David’s life could only be ransomed by Christ’s imputing *His own* righteousness to this sinning king.

Sing about the amazing imputation of Christ’s righteousness to even those tainted with the darkest sins, using *Trinity Hymnal # 463*:

1 A debtor to mercy alone,
of covenant mercy I sing;
nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
my person and offering to bring.
The terrors of law and of God

with me can have nothing to do;
my Savior's obedience and blood
hide all my transgressions from view.

3 My name from the palms of his hands
eternity will not erase;
impressed on his heart it remains,
in marks of indelible grace.

Yes, I to the end shall endure,
as sure as the earnest is giv'n;
more happy, but not more secure,
the glorified spirits in heav'n.

Thurs/Fri: Read Psalm 23:1-3; 2 Samuel 12:1-23 & 1 Peter 1:10-12

Bearing it All

According to 1 Peter 1:10-12, all the prophets of the Old Testament learned that the Holy Spirit of prophecy in them was pointing into the future, to the coming of Christ. But they also learned by that same Spirit that it was the *sufferings* of this Christ that they were predicting.

It is the same for us in our day concerning the heinousness of our own sin: Only with Christ the sacrificial Lamb clearly in view can Nathan the prophet declare in 2 Samuel 12:13 that David’s sin (and ours) can be taken away:

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David,
The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

What a painful way for David to learn the weight of sin! David the prophet learned what the Holy Spirit in him was revealing when it came to his own sin. As 1 Peter 1:10-12 says (*italics mine*):

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied ... inquired what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating *when He predicted the sufferings of Christ* and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

How hard and good God is to us in addressing our sins. David, that sweet Psalm-singer and prophet, writes his most heartfelt song about his own sin. He grieved the Holy Spirit by his sin (Ephesians 4:30) and then discovered that the Holy Spirit *in him* was prophesying about the pain and sufferings *which his sin would cause* when the sacrificial Lamb Jesus finally came.

Let us marvel at the gracious patience and kindness of the Holy Spirit – willing to live in the breast of David *when it was David who epitomized in his sin the painful rupture that would have to occur in the Triune family in Heaven*. Because of David, the Spirit would grieve with the Father as they saw the Son die in our nature. Because of David's sin (and ours) the weight of the guilt of all such sins would fall upon Christ.

The Puritan John Owen says that *the same Holy Spirit* who inspired David's prophecies about Christ and revealed the sufferings of Christ for sin (including his with Bathsheba) also supported and carried the Son of God to the threshold of the Temple at Calvary. Christ saw the furnace of Divine justice into which He would enter, appearing to Him a million times hotter than the fires of Tolkien's Mt. Doom. He sweated blood, expressing the true horror of every sin, every theft, every adulterous act, malicious thought or false word (to use Jonathan Edward's illustration).

But because it was through the Holy Spirit that He carried our sins away, like David we can know that the greatest stain of sin can indeed be removed. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14). The world hates such grace and generosity from God. But we rejoice in it in the words of *Trinity Hymnal* # 486:

1 God, be merciful to me,
on thy grace I rest my plea;
plenteous in compassion thou,
blot out my transgressions now;
wash me, make me pure within,
cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

2 My transgressions I confess,
grief and guilt my soul oppress;
I have sinned against thy grace
and provoked thee to thy face;
I confess thy judgment just,
speechless, I thy mercy trust.

3 I am evil, born in sin;
thou desirest truth within.
thou alone my Savior art,
teach thy wisdom to my heart;
make me pure, thy grace bestow,
wash me whiter than the snow.

4 Broken, humbled to the dust
by thy wrath and judgment just,
let my contrite heart rejoice
and in gladness hear thy voice;
from my sins O hide thy face,
blot them out in boundless grace.

5 Gracious God, my heart renew,
make my spirit right and true;
cast me not away from thee,
let thy Spirit dwell in me;
thy salvation's joy impart,
steadfast make my willing heart.

6 Sinners then shall learn from me
and return, O God, to thee;
Savior, all my guilt remove,
and my tongue shall sing thy love;
touch my silent lips, O Lord,
and my mouth shall praise accord.

Sat/Sun: Read Psalm 23:1-3, 2 Samuel 12:10-12 & Amos 2:4-5

Sinching Against Grace

David's sin did not just damage his own family and royal legacy. His sin played a role in all the ruptures that came about in the royal houses of Israel, leading eventually to civil war, a divided kingdom, and the seeds of Israel's idolatrous rebellion. David's successor and son, Solomon – what was the besetting sin of his reign, wise, rich and famous though he was? It was that his heart was “led astray by foreign women.” He gave into the temptation of having a roving eye, just as his father had.

Let us learn from the life of David that the LORD's “path of righteousness” in Psalm 23:3 includes the path of the heart-breaking chastisement of His own when they sin. We bring upon ourselves great temporal judgments in this world when we break God's Law. David learned this and we should tremble, too. “LORD, save us from sinning in our old age as David did!” How appropriate, then, for us to end this week with the sins of the house of Judah in Amos 2. This was the royal house of David and the root of Messianic hope in all of Israel. The transgression of God's Law always has terrible consequences.

But still we can hear the world argue: Why is breaking the Law of the LORD even mentioned as a sin (Amos 2:4)? Isn't it liberating *not* to be subject to God's requirements? Can we not make our own world free from the shackles and demands of the thundering God of Mt Sinai? Well, to whom much is given, much is required. To Israel was given the holy law, no other. Even more, in this royal tribe, the root family of our Savior, these sins were particularly egregious.

Meditate and Pray: We have been given so much. May God spare us from sinning against the great outpouring of His grace in our lives. I close with these sober words from our Westminster Confession of Faith:

As there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation, so there is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.

But so much depends on the grace of repentance which God alone gives. May God pour our such a humble and contrite spirit upon us – for even the “small sins” of our lives!