

2 Samuel 11:1-15

FROM DISGRACE TO GRACE

A number of years ago, I was getting ready one morning to take our children to school when our son Andrew asked me for lunch money. I was surprised since I had given him his lunch money on Monday to last the entire week and this was only Wednesday; so, I asked him where the rest of the money had gone. He didn't answer me directly. Instead, he said, "Come on, Dad, we're going to be late for school; can I just have the lunch money?" I said, "We'll leave as soon as you tell me what happened to the lunch money I already gave you?" By this time in the conversation, he was really getting worked up about being late for school: "Dad, we're going to be late! Please just give me some money for lunch!" I replied, "Honey, I'm okay with you being late for school because it's more important to me that I get an honest answer from you. What happened to the lunch money I gave you?" "I guess I lost it. I don't know what happened to it." I felt there was more to his story so I sat down and waited patiently for the truth to unfold.

When Andrew saw that I wasn't going to budge, he finally came "clean." He told me that he had bet a boy in his class that the University of North Carolina's basketball team would win a game earlier in that week and, to Andrew's great surprise, the Tarheels had lost. The other boy, who was a lot bigger than Andrew, told him to pay up or get beat up. Andrew paid off his debt with his remaining lunch money, and that was why he was now broke and in need of more funds. If I remember correctly, he made and took his lunch to school that day, the rest of the week, and the following week as well. I think there were other consequences as well. I used that experience as a teachable moment for our children. I tried to impress upon them that if they messed up, we would deal with the problem together. But if they lied or tried to cover up the problem, then, the punishment would be greater because the problem had been compounded by not telling the truth in the first place. It was always better to be honest.

It seems to me that, when we mess up and do something we shouldn't be doing, we rely on one of two plans of action to gloss over our mistakes. One option is to play the blame game wherein we point our finger at someone or something else. It really wasn't our fault – "the devil made me do it; the dog ate my homework; I know it was wrong to hit him but *he hit me first.*"

Of course, the classical, biblical example is found early on in the Bible when Yahweh went looking for the man and the woman in the garden for they had hidden themselves from the presence of the Lord God. The Lord found them (and God will always find us, without fail) and asked them if they had eaten from "the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man quickly responded, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate." In other words, Adam didn't take ownership of his own irresponsibility and sinful venture. Rather, he blamed both Yahweh for giving the woman to him, and the woman for giving him the fruit!

The other preferred method of not taking responsibility for our wrongdoings is a cover-up in the hope that we can get away with it! This was Andrew's strategy, and it is certainly the strategy of many of our nation's governors, congressmen, presidential candidates, and even presidents, who have had extra-marital affairs. Occasionally, a person may get away with a wrongful action for the time being, but surely you have

noticed that, more often than not, the wrongdoing “bubbles up to the surface” and what was once hidden is now on public display for all to see!

Of course, the classical, biblical example is found in our Old Testament lesson for today. Here is a “royal” cover-up, literally! By this time in his career, King David had stepped out of his military role on the battlefield and had concentrated more on his administrative duties in Jerusalem. One day, David stood in his new palace and surveyed the surrounding area. His attention was drawn to a certain roof where a very beautiful woman was bathing. The Hebrew word indicates that King David did more than just a casual glance. He peered at the lovely woman intently over a period of time. David inquired about her and found out that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. David sent for her; and whether out of fear, obedience, or desire, Bathsheba came to him and he lay with her.

The hidden sin became compounded by the fact that Bathsheba turned up pregnant. Also, both David and Bathsheba were guilty of adultery, which was punishable by death according to the Law (Lev. 20:10). Thus, David panicked and did his very best to cover-up his sin. He sent for Uriah under the guise of checking on the progress of the battle with the Ammonites. In reality, David wanted Uriah to spend time with his wife. However, Uriah refused to go to his home to his wife because it simply wasn't right for him to do so while his fellow soldiers were sleeping in the field.

The next night David tried to get Uriah drunk so that Uriah would lower his inhibitions and go home and enjoy his wife. But, that plan failed as well. Finally, David sent Uriah back to the army with a note to Joab, the commander. The note instructed Joab to put Uriah in the front line of the fighting and then order retreat, knowing that as a true professional soldier, Uriah would never fall back and would then be surrounded and killed by the enemy. Joab did as he was told, and, the plan worked just as David had hoped it would. Before long, “Uriah the Hittite died” in battle.

After a brief time of mourning, King David married Bathsheba and every thing seemed to drift back to normal. And after due time, Bathsheba gave birth to their son. It appeared that David had pulled it off, gotten away with murder, literally. In fact, David had broken at least three of Israel's basic laws found within the Ten Commandments: he coveted another man's wife, he committed adultery with her, and then he killed. But, unfortunately, as we have seen in our own time, people in power do not play by the same rules and laws; they can do as they please – at least, that's what they tell themselves.

In David's case, what was hidden was about to be made known. After all, sin was still sin whether it was concealed or known. David thought he had escaped detection. However, there was one exception: “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to David.” Nathan told David about a rich man who owned vast herds of sheep and cattle but who took by force the one little pet lamb, which belonged to a very poor man. When David heard about the outrageous injustice that had been done, he flew into a rage and said that anyone guilty of such an act of injustice should die. Nathan then said to David, “You are the man.”

The truth was out in the open. David's dirty deeds were exposed to the light, and David himself had no where to go to hide from Yahweh's all discerning gaze. All David could do was face the truth of the accusation. He finally chose the third and correct option; he confess his sin to the Lord with all due repentance. King David had sinned

against Bathsheba and Uriah in terms of getting his own way with both of them. But, ultimately, David's sin was against the Lord God!

Here's what we know for sure: no matter how careful we are about covering up a sin, either in this life or in the judgment to follow, the sin will become known. There will be full disclosure at some point in time. Furthermore, there will be consequences. In David's case, the child David and Bathsheba had conceived died shortly after birth; one of David's sons treated his half-sister as David had treated Bathsheba; his son Absalom became a murderer and a usurper of his father's throne.

However, there is one other thing to be said and, for David's sake as well as our own, it is the most important thing to note. Despite our sinful natures, despite the ways in which we strive to cover up our sins or have to deal with the consequences of those sins, whenever we are truly convicted of our sins and own up to them, then (and only then!) God can go to work on us and clean us up good!

While we have focused mostly on David's sin, this is also a story about God, who is willing to intrude in our sinful lives, assert righteousness on our behalf, and forgive us. God takes our disgrace and "covers it over" with divine grace. Sin doesn't have to have the last word. Sin doesn't ultimately define us as human beings. Created in God's own image and redeemed by God's own Son, God's holy Word of love, grace, and mercy is spoken to each one of us. Sins are forgiven and we are restored to God and God's people once more. Here is the good news of the Gospel: no matter how sinful we are, God's love is greater still. God's goodness and righteousness trump our sins. We are made new creations in Jesus Christ – forgiven, reconciled, and sent to tell others the Good News.

I've never forgotten a story that Dr. William Barclay told in his commentary of The Gospel of Mark. There was an evangelist called Brownlow North. He was a man of God, but in his youth he had lived a wild life. One Sunday he was to preach in Aberdeen. Before he entered the pulpit a letter was handed to him. The writer of the letter recounted a shameful incident in Brownlow North's life before he became a Christian and stated that if Brownlow North dared to preach he would rise in the church and publicly proclaim what once he had done. Brownlow North took the letter into the pulpit with him. He read it to the congregation. He told them that it was perfectly true. Then he told them how, through Christ, he had been forgiven, how he had been enabled to overcome himself and put the past behind him, how, through Christ, he was a new creature. He used his own shame as a magnet to draw (others) to Christ. (pages 371-372)

Here are two realities, which shape our lives. Sin is a very real part of our human condition. No matter how hard we try and refrain from sinning or we blame others or cover up the sins of our own doing, we all fall short of God's glory and God's hopes for us. However, God's forgiveness always follows our sincere repentance, and God's grace dispels our disgrace (even though there may still be consequences to face). Jesus' death on the cross for our sins offers us forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to change course and be transformed into Christ's likeness.

God transformed David back into a real man of God. And, God took a Brownlow North and shaped him so that he could reflect the light of God's love and, like a magnet, draw others to Christ. And now, God is going to work on us! By the grace of God, may we strive to live godly lives and declare to all others the glory of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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