

David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-15)

Alfred Lord Tennyson in his poem Locksley Hall wrote "In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

As we continue our series focusing on a section of Israel's History we have moved on from the time of King Saul to the reign of David his successor. You may remember that last time I preached we thought about David's anointing some years before he actually began his reign. At His anointing David was identified as King but the events and training he would experience in the years before his reign began help to equip him for the task.

David put his trust in God and went forward in faith eventually being acknowledged as King by the people.

In today's Old Testament reading we encounter King David some years later. The years of trouble and uncertainty with civil war and the conflict with the Philistines has past.

King David now is settled and secure in his power and sovereignty. He has united the Northern and Southern Kingdoms and set up his capital in Jerusalem and it is a time of relative peace .

And, although we are told it is spring the time when kings go to battle any skirmishes were being dealt with by his very competent military commanders, so David has time on his hands to mooch around his palace in Jerusalem.

He is powerful, well respected and monarch of all he surveys; he can command at will what ever he fancies and in this spring time his "fancy lightly turns to love"

The trouble is the woman he desires whose name is Bathsheba, is married but such is his lust this fact does not weigh with him and he sends for her to be brought to the palace.

The sin of adultery is compounded (and the writer actually emphasises this point) by telling us that she was observing the time of ritual purification following her period a time when sexual intercourse was forbidden by Jewish law as set out in the book of Leviticus chapters 15 and 18

After a brief time of passion, David moves on to other things BUT that isn't the end of the story.

Actions have consequences and after an interval Bathsheba sends a message to David to say that she's pregnant.

The evidence of that spring afternoon's adulterous alliance was about to become plain for all to see and everyone would know the baby wasn't her husband's because he was off with Joab besieging Rabbah and "ravaging" the Ammonites at the time.

So David tries to conceal his misdemeanour by summoning Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, back to Jerusalem from the fighting.

David then encourages Uriah to go to his home and lay with his wife, so everyone will think the baby is his.

My Grand mother at this point would say "Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive"

And so it turns out, for David's plan meets with a snag when Uriah refuses to go home. He has a particular dedication and loyalty to his comrades who are still fighting and a spiritual devotion to God who's precious ark of the covenant is housed in a tent and he will not betray either of these loyalties by returning home and indulging in his own comforts. I do wonder if Uriah had an inkling of what was going on and of David's real purpose in sending him home to his wife? If so was his refusal to go also a refusal to condone David's act of adultery?

When this plan fails, David hatches another scheme, this time it involves others in the deception. He writes a letter to his commander of the army, Joab, instructing him to put Uriah in the heaviest part of the battle they were about to fight with the express purpose that he would be killed. So Uriah leaves Jerusalem and travels back to Rabbah carrying his own death warrant.

This story has several things to teach us, so let's just pick up on a few of these.

Firstly we need to note that for David things are going well he is successful, admired and powerful. But sadly this has an adverse effect on him. Through out this bit of the narrative of his life the word send occurs 12 times. It is an indication to the reader that David is in authority and commands obedience from all his subjects who carry out his orders.

This Great King, who as a lad put his trust in God and went forward in faith, begins to rely less on God and more on trusting in his own power and authority; as a result, his faith begins to grow dim.

Secondly David does wrong for his own selfish reasons and then when it appears he is about to be found out he tries to cover it up, manipulating people and circumstances for his own purposes.

There is a certain section of people who even today consider that doing something wrong is ok so long as you don't get caught.

After all David's wrong doing and his deceit in trying to cover it up, we discover, if we read on into the next chapter, that the Prophet Nathan confronts him and exposes his transgression.

But in the end we find that David repents and receives God's forgiveness. However, the consequences of his sin continued, for, although after Uriah's death, David takes Bathsheba to be his wife their child conceived in adultery dies.

David's story is a solemn reminder to us not only that there is a danger in putting our trust in worldly things for this can result in our drifting away from God. And like David's misdemeanour this has a knock on effect which leads to managing our lives by the worlds standards and not by Christ's example and teaching.