

REPENTANCE: FROM COVER-UP TO CLEAN-UP

Give up the cover-up -- Get going on the clean-up

2 Samuel 11:26--12:10,13-15

TEXT: *When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'... Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill.*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

There is a wide-spread abuse of the Gospel in our day. It is the opinion that, since God is love He forgives me even if I do not repent of my sins. That opinion will not like what the prophet Nathan did to King David, just as they will hate today's pastors who condemn their immoral behavior.

As it often happens, whenever we enjoy good times, we become arrogant, self-satisfied, then ripe for a fall. That happened to the great king. And it is important to know that, had David died during his attempted cover-up of sin, he would have gone to hell forever. But God brought him to true repentance and gave him the heart to begin living for God instead of against Him. This is the meaning of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: ***Lead us not into temptation!*** We pray that the Holy Spirit keep us always in the state of true repentance which gives up on any cover-up of sin, and has the heart to clean up our sinfulness to the glory of God!

Things were going well for David and his kingdom. He was now a man of wealth and leisure. One day, from the vantage point of his palace roof, he saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing. He burned with lust, and used his kingly authority to summon her to himself. But God began to reveal his sin, for a short time later Bathsheba informed him that she was pregnant. But Bathsheba was married to Uriah, one of David's best soldiers. So to continue the cover-up, David plotted Uriah's death. He tried to make it look innocent by placing Uriah in the front line of battle where he was killed. With phony sadness, he told his general: ***Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another.*** Then to make himself look like the honorable king he married Bathsheba.

It was an elaborate cover-up that fooled most of the nation. But it did not fool God. The Bible says: ***But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.*** And it displeased David as well. All during her pregnancy, the joyous prospect of a baby on the way was replaced with days and nights of secret remorse. David knew that he had sinned and he knew he was trying to cover it up. In his later years he described this guilty conscience in his Psalms: (Ps 51) ***I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me...*** and, (Ps 32) ***When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long... For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer...*** But remorse is NOT repentance. David's guilty conscience made him physically sick.

In truth, he was SPIRITUALLY SICK. No man can make his sin look good before God. I might fool you, I might fool my wife and children, I might fool the pastor, but I cannot fool God! The Apostle Paul reminds us: ***Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.*** Ga 6:7 No matter how much I punish myself, no matter how many tears I cry, no matter how many good deeds I do to pay for my evil, I cannot cover-up the truth of my sin.

Only God can cover up my guilt, and this He has done through Christ. The only perfect cover-up for our sin is the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

Therefore God leads us to confess, not cover up, our sins, and by His perfect removal of sin, enables us to start fresh and to go in the right direction.

God's grace is first revealed in sending the pastor to David. The Bible says that ***The LORD sent Nathan to David...*** Nathan is direct and to the point. He uses a parable about a poor man whose pet lamb is eaten by a rich man to convict David of his own sin. Still pretending to be the good king, he puts on his own self-righteousness and declares: ***"As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!..."*** -- ***Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"*** The Bible says: ***Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."*** And immediately, Nathan did what God commands us to do when someone confesses his sin: ***Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.*** We have not departed from this work of God, as our public Absolution reveals in the words spoken by the Pastor: ***"...by the COMMAND of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins..."***

David later wrote about this moment of grace. In Psalm 32 he wrote: ***Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*** In Psalm 51, a Psalm written ***When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba...*** David writes: ***Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*** To this day, these words are sung as part of our worship liturgy. They speak of the ONLY cover-up that truly removes our sins, and of the ***renew(al) of a steadfast spirit*** gets us going in the right direction!

That "right direction" for David would start with a willingness to "clean up" his mess. Even though he was completely and fully forgiven, there was the matter of the **public offense** of his sin. He had used God's gifts and his kingly powers to take another man's wife.

David couldn't bring Uriah back or undo the adultery and the pregnancy, but he could follow God's command to restore honor to the office of Israel's king. It would cost him his son. Nathan explained it this way: ***The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die.*** God must show the world that what the king did was wrong.

Sometimes the dreadful consequences of our sins may never be undone, but if our repentance is sincere and real, we will do what we can do from this day forward to obey His commandments, give glory to God and honor to His name. And though it may be hard, we look forward to turning our pitiful "cover-ups" to "clean-ups" that honor Him until He summons us from this world of sin to our glorious home on heaven.

With a converted heart, David willingly accepted this discipline. "Repentance" means a "change of mind," and he was willing to suffer the Lord's discipline to restore honor to God's office of king.

With David we also confess: ***Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*** But not all our sins are public. Not all our sins cause others to sin, stumble and fall! Not all our sins require a public "clean up" of some mess we have caused. Jesus has so taught us to pray: ***Lead us not into***

temptation! As Luther explains, we pray that the Lord would graciously **guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins...**

For this reason, gathering together as we do on a regular basis is so important. Not only are we strengthened by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, but with the fellowship of other Christians we confess our sins and are absolved by God's servant of the Word.

God be with us as He was with David, and give us a steadfast and willing heart to confess, not cover up sin, and with a repentant heart pray for the power and will always to clean up the messes we cause until the day when this work of faith is ended, and we join David and all repentant believers in heaven! Amen.