

## **“Crimes and Misdemeanors”**

2 Samuel 11:1-15

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We turn now to the one story about King David that is second only to David and Goliath in terms of familiarity. Even the biblically illiterate know the gist of the story of David and Bathsheba. The biblical account of David's dalliance makes David real. Here we see even royals can royally mess up. Scholars argue it is stories like this that prove the historical truth of King David's reign. Why else would such a story be included in the Bible, if it were NOT true? It certainly does not ingratiate David to us.

***In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.***

While his army and his generals risk life and limb, David lounges back at home in relative ease.

***One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her.***

Here we see the Bible emphasizing Bathsheba's beauty, in such a way that it almost seems as if David's sin is **her** fault. King David simply couldn't help himself. And why was she bathing out in the courtyard in plain view of the king's roof anyway?

***[David] said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her.***

David knew perfectly well who she was. He knew full well who she was married to. Uriah was one of David's generals.

Lately in our Sunday school class we have been talking about the original languages of the Bible. The NIV translation I just read completely misses the sense of the Hebrew verbs. I don't know. It makes you wonder if they whitewashed it for a reason. The NAS translation is more to the point: ***So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.***

He sent. He took. He lay. There is some violence in this spare description. David simply took her. There was no love, no talk, no romance, only possession. He wanted. He took.

***Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."***

Notice how they don't even name her here. She is "the woman".

Though today we are so jaded most would dismiss such an adulterous liaison, even if a child resulted, David must not let his adultery come to light. Scripture notes tell us adultery was serious, but not a reason to put someone to death---at least not enough to put a male monarch to death. We can only guess what was going on in the King's mind. David, not one to dally, quickly concocts a solution to this inconvenient truth. He will invite Bathsheba's husband home for the weekend and get him to sleep with her.

Who said the Bible isn't interesting?

***So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him.***

***But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"***

Uriah is a striking contrast to King David. His name means (I am not kidding), "Yahweh is my light". He wouldn't dream of enjoying the comforts of home and wife while his men are roughing it out near the field of battle. Not only is he honoring his men, he is respecting the wartime taboo against marital relations, required of every warrior. He is honoring the law. David, ignoring Uriah's righteousness, tries again, this time plying Uriah with alcohol.

***Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem***

***that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.***

Here is where the plot thickens. Here is where things get ugly. Having slept on his doorstep, Uriah is headed back to the battlefield. Everyone knows Uriah has not even stepped foot inside his own home, let alone been alone with his wife. People will soon put 1+1 together and realize that there has been something less than honorable going on between two neighbors. The spiral of violence that began with a single glance across a courtyard begins to spin out of control, as David can no longer control the outcome with his plans. Sin is like quicksand; the more David tries to extricate himself, the deeper he sinks.

***In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."***

David has signed Uriah's death warrant. And he does it in a particularly despicable way. He hides behind his commanders and his own army.

In the 1989 Woody Allen film Crimes and Misdemeanors, ophthalmologist Judah Rosenthal is at a crossroads. Judah has a dirty secret. An upstanding family man, a pillar of his community and his profession, Rosenthal is finally confronted by his long-time mistress. Dolores (**her** name means "sadness") threatens to expose the affair if Judah doesn't divorce his wife and marry her. Judah tries to break off the affair. Dolores escalates, calling his home. She mails a letter to Judah's wife, which Judah conveniently intercepts.

Rosenthal has no intention of divorcing his wife. He never did. His mistress becomes increasingly hysterical. Rosenthal becomes increasingly desperate. Eventually he turns to his brother, who has criminal connections. His brother suggests a "final solution" which shocks Rosenthal. "She's not an insect! You don't just step on her! It's pure evil! A man kills for money and he doesn't even know his victims!"<sup>1</sup> It is this evil to which Judah eventually succumbs. Judah betrays his lover and signs the death warrant for Dolores.

[In the words of Woody Allen, from the film]: "And after the awful deed is done, he finds that he's plagued by deep-rooted guilt. Little sparks of his religious background which he'd rejected are suddenly stirred up. He hears his father's voice. He imagines that God is watching

his every move. Suddenly, it's not an empty universe at all, but a just and moral one, and he's violated it. Now, he's panic-stricken. He's on the verge of a mental collapse-an inch away from confessing the whole thing to the police.”<sup>ii</sup>

Instead, he confesses to his rabbi, who urges him to come clean. The Rabbi (who is blind) sees what Judah (the ophthalmologist) cannot. Rabbi Ben sees God's Law, and believes Judah will never find rest as long as he lives this terrible lie. The Rabbi reminds Judah, “Without the law, it's all darkness.”

Darkness. Terrible darkness. An affair, a series of lies, cheating, an unwanted pregnancy, an unwanted soul.

It is easy to think of Bathsheba (or Dolores) as sexual sirens, seductive temptresses. Yet this story is not just about adultery and murder. This story tells us how a small temptation can unravel even the best of us. Who is YOUR Bathsheba? WHAT is your Dolores?

Who, what, or where are the people, the things, the vices which tempt you? What keeps you from doing what you know is right? What are the things which seem innocent and fleeting, but which may quickly turn into a slippery slope of increasing sin?

Unfaithfulness, unfortunately, can take many forms. Unfaithfulness happens when we lose sight of our priorities, when we allow our minds to wander to forbidden temptations, to linger too long where they should not be. Unfaithfulness usually starts out pretty innocently. “I'll just send this one little email.” “This isn't going to hurt anybody. . .” “No one will notice if. . .” “I deserve this.” “What difference will it make in the grand scheme?” How many of us have said such things to ourselves, talking ourselves out of some commitment, into some untruth?

Every single day we are confronted with moral choices. Most of the time these are very small choices and small dilemmas. Do we shade our side of the story to make ourselves look good, or do we admit to our faults? Do we withhold information that may help a coworker out of a bind? Do we walk by and ignore someone who may need our help? Are we ever less than forthright about our intentions, our history, our abilities? Do we always think of things in terms of how they affect us? Do we fill our spare time numbed with television, media, substances, so we don't have to think about what we are doing?

Sometimes Bathsheba comes masquerading as someone (or something) else. We associate Bathsheba with lust and lies, but she may

dress up in the clothing of virtue. One of the problems today is so many things **seem** good, but often *are not good* for us. So many things are not what they appear to be.

The choices we make every day matter. They are, in the words of C. S. Lewis, either turning us into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature. The choices we make, in the words of J. K. Rowling, matter. “It is not your talents which define who you are. It is your choices.”<sup>iii</sup>

The choices we make, in the words of Woody Allen, matter. They may seem trivial at times, but they can be a matter of life and death.

(The ending of the film:) “We're all faced throughout our lives with agonizing decisions, moral choices. Some are on a grand scale, most of these choices are on lesser points. But we define ourselves by the choices we have made. We are, in fact, the sum total of our choices. Events unfold so unpredictably, so unfairly. Human happiness does not seem to be included in the design of creation. It is only we, with our capacity to love that gives meaning to the indifferent universe. And yet, most human beings seem to have the ability to keep trying and even try to find joy from simple things, like their family, their work, and from the hope that future generations might understand more.”<sup>iv</sup>

It matters, in the words of theologian C.S. Lewis. It matters, in the words of novelist J. K. Rowling. It matters, even in the words of a self-proclaimed atheist, Woody Allen. But most important, the choices we make matter to God.

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<sup>i</sup> From the motion picture film, Crimes and Misdemeanors.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> From the screenplay, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.

<sup>iv</sup> From the motion picture film, Crimes and Misdemeanors (ending scene).