

## **"Turning to God especially in a time of Peace"**

Two weeks ago we studied the downfall of the first king of Israel, Saul. Saul feared "humans who have but a breath in their nostrils" but didn't "fear the Lord." This led to his downfall. Like Saul, we too are apt to fear humans. However, Saul's downfall tells us that God should be the only one we should naturally fear.

Last week we talked about how David fought the giant Goliath without fear, and how he didn't thrust his spear through Saul even though he was in a situation to kill Saul who was after his life. We concluded that the reason why David was able to do God's will, regarding these two situations, was because he had "previously prepared for that day."

David was a "human who had but a breath in his nostrils," just like us; and as long as he was a human being, he was not perfect. David made a few big mistakes in his lifetime. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about David's mistakes is that incident with Bathsheba.

After King Saul, who was chasing after David, dies in battle, David sits on the throne as Israel's ruler. Through God's grace and mercy, even in the midst of war, Israel experiences a succession of victories, leading to stabilization. Ever since defeating Goliath, David stood in the front lines as a distinguished soldier, commanding others. As the country stabilized, David would stay in Jerusalem and spend peaceful days at the palace unless under special circumstances that required him on the field. His soldiers went to battle instead of David and these battles too would go smoothly.

One evening, waking up from a midday nap, David went to the roof of his palace. In a state of relaxation of both mind and body, David looked down at the city and the surrounding walls he built up in his generation. When you visit Jerusalem, the ruins of the City of David remain even until this day. The City of David is built along the Kidron Valley and is surrounded by city walls. There's actually a tour that shows you around the City. That tour starts off at the highest point of the ruins then goes down into the valley; which means that the highest point where the tour started was where David's palace was at, and from his balcony he was looking at the city below him.

As he looks out over the city he hears water. As he glances over, he notices a woman taking a bath in a courtyard. David's palace was a safe place protected by many soldiers. So for David, the balcony was the safest place for him to be. He certainly didn't have to wear his military uniform or have a sword by his side; He was able to be in his robe and relax. But this most safe and pleasant place all of a sudden became the most dangerous place. I wonder what state his heart was in at that moment. Yes, we cannot forget that David too was a human who have but a breath in his nostrils.

When David sent someone to find out who this woman was, he learns that her name was Bathsheba and that she was the wife of one of his soldiers Uriah, who was out in the fields fighting for Israel. David knew this, yet called her to his palace and sleeps with her. Later, Bathsheba discovers that she is pregnant and David tries every possible method to cover up what he had done. But all his methods fail and so he has Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, who has only ever been loyal to him assigned to the front lines where the battle was fiercest. There Uriah was killed in battle. To hide the first, one sin led to the next and this is how David fell into the bottomless pit of sin (2 Samuel 12).

One summer night when I was in high school, I got in an accident. I had just finished my part-time job at a restaurant by the Shonan coast and was riding my motorcycle along the smooth coastline but couldn't make the turn and ran into the guardrail. It was about 6 months since I started riding my bike, so I had started to think I was good at riding a motorcycle. I thought that I could make the turn all cool without slowing down, but I was wrong; I wasn't able to make the turn and ended up crashing. Luckily I wasn't hurt but my spoked wheel was bent and I could no longer ride my bike, so all that I've earned that summer went towards fixing it. Because of this experience, even until this day, when I take a curb I always slow down. It's because that feeling of my heart jumping and thinking "oh shoot!" was etched into my heart.

When we face a crisis we become cautious. That caution saves us. But when we don't face any problems, actually, when things are going very smoothly, our guards are down. We become too relaxed. We are even arrogant. And that's when we're most at risk.

There's a Chinese tactic/strategy where you try to make your "enemies feel arrogant." When your enemy starts becoming arrogant, you certainly have many opportunities to take advantage. It's because they put their guard down, neglecting their cautious defense. When that affair with Bathsheba took place, David nor Israel were in a crisis. Actually, David's private and public life were both very peaceful during this time. But this put him at extreme risk.

When David faced the challenge of Goliath and was fleeing from Saul's madness, he was in a situation where he could lose his life. In those times, David was able to win because he was prepared. However, all that he was equipped with was useless when he was living in those peaceful days, waking up from a nap and seeing a woman bathing.

We gain wisdom from this failure of David. As the saying "one will pray to the gods in extremity" we seek God's help when we are facing a problem or crisis. We read the bible more than usual. We attend services or attend meetings more studiously. We become humble and cautious. In these kinds of situations, the solution to the problem becomes realistic. And when our problems are solved, we leave the bible, services and meetings, as if nothing happened. God becomes less and less of a priority.

That's when we think, "My problem's solved, I'm safe now." But the funny thing is, what we learn from David today is that, we have to stay closely connected to the Lord all the more when facing no problems. This problem of David, which occurred in a time of peace, was no small problem. It was a problem that led to a man's death; and remember, this didn't happen in a time of crisis, but in a calm and peaceful evening.

It was the same with Adam and Eve. They lived comfortably in a perfect environment without pain or grief when they ate the forbidden fruit. Speaking of the impact that this has on us today, we live in a world where the power of sin is so great it almost swallows us in.

I say it again. That is why we need to stay connected to the Lord all the more when we are living in a time of peace and tranquility. In a time of crisis, our thoughts are focused on the problem, that's why these problems tend to be

solved much quicker. But frequently, the problems that occur outside of a crisis tend to be last-noticed, deep-rooted and difficult to solve.

The sins David committed were: adultery, deceit and murder. Being a powerful king, I'm sure David was able to hide his scandal under his power. But even if you succeed in deceiving or silencing people, God sees everything. God sends Nathan the prophet to rebuke David for what a great sin he had committed before the Lord.

David could have captured Nathan right then and there and sent him to prison. Many kings in those days didn't feel responsible for their sins and probably did just that, as if nothing happened. But David was different.

David was true to himself and clung to the Lord. He broke down before Nathan, confessed his sins and sang a song like this:

**Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. 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. (Psalm 32:1-5)**

David realizes what a sin he had committed, and writes about his days when he kept the sin in his heart: **"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."** "When I kept silent" undoubtedly pointed to the time before Nathan rebuked David. When David refused to confess his sin, he said he was weak and miserable, groaning all day long. In fact, he didn't say he was dry or thirsty; he said he was withered completely.

How painful must it had been to be in such a condition day after day. No matter how abundant your life is and how much power you have, as long as you're in such a state, no one will be able to satisfy their hearts nor could they feel peace again.

What David had done could be described perfectly with the phrase, "tempted by an evil spirit." We first think of "Satan" when we think of the word "evil spirit." We also think of "the power of the devil." At that time, David indeed was possessed by an evil spirit but he didn't say the evil was "done by Satan or the power of the devil." He said it was "something *he* had done."

In these situations, we oftentimes say "it's the power of the devil." But before we link our doing to "the power of the devil" the very first thing we need to reflect on is ourselves by asking "was there a problem with me?" Next, we need to reflect on "those who were involved" and then further reflect on various things, then after all that can we only think "if the power of the devil was at work."

If from the start we say, "it was the devil's work, period" we will never reflect on ourselves and learn from these mistakes which will lead to similar problems in the future. If we blame our problems on "the power of the devil" our problems will grow bigger and bigger because they are untreated. And who do you think is smiling at this? The devil. Normally, it's undesirable to be blamed about something you had nothing to do with. But what if you're unable to find the cause of the problem, because you blame the devil, and the problem gets worse and worse; the devil surely must be rejoicing triumphantly.

David admitted his sin himself, and tightly held onto God. Psalm 51 is written by David, but the bible consciously notes: "**For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.**" What David had done was known throughout the country. He admits his faults. Then as a man who have but a breath in his nostrils, sings this song:

**Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge... Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take**

**pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.**

Dear brothers and sisters, we have but a breath in our nostrils. But because we have but a breath in our nostrils, we commit sins like David. And we as humans, cannot redeem our sins ourselves. It was the same with David. That is why David sought forgiveness from the Lord.

Easter is coming up next month. But before the joy of Easter we have to know the true meaning of the cross. What was the cross? The cross was a place where Jesus took on the penalty of our sins, the sins that we ourselves cannot redeem. Throughout the bible it tells us that we are forgiven and freed from our unsolvable sins because of the cross.

You may think, God can't do anything about the things I've done. I'm sorry but you're wrong, because God's love is far deeper than anything we have ever done. There is no sin that God's love and forgiveness cannot pardon. All we need is what David tells us at the end of his song, a broken spirit.

**You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.**

The Lord doesn't delight in sacrifices to make up for our sins. Sins cannot be forgiven by something like sacrifices to begin with. What the Lord wants from us is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. And the bible tells us to take that broken spirit and stand before the cross where Jesus died for our sins.

Psalm 116:10 says **"I trust in the Lord when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted.'"** David certainly continued to trust in the Lord when he was deeply troubled. Speaking of his state of mind, he was in deep despair, despair that made him weak and miserable. But no matter how weak and miserable he was feeling, he trusted the Lord. Furthermore, no matter how big of a suffering came along, he still continued to trust in the Lord.

Just like David, we are humans who have but a breath in our nostrils. Whether it may differ in size or content, let us, as David did, bring our broken spirit, and our

broken and repentant heart before Christ who died on the cross. Let us continue to trust in the love and forgiveness of our Lord even when we are greatly distressed in our faults and sins. And if our loved ones have deeply sunk into sin, let us pray that their spirits will break, so that they can come back to the Lord and experience His love that will pardon their sins.

I would like to end this message with a passage from Hebrews 10:38-39. **"But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved."** As humans who have but a breath in our nostrils, we cannot completely trust ourselves. But we are able to place trust in the love of Jesus Christ who shed his blood on the cross at Calvary for us 2000 years ago. We believe that we are those who continue to have faith and are saved. We are not like those who turn our backs on God and seal our fate because we have faith that assures our salvation.

Let us pray.