

Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 21, 2 Samuel 11

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This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 21, 2 Samuel 11. O, What a Tangled Web We Weave, Power Poisons the Conscience.

Well, we've come to 2 Samuel chapter 11 in our study. I've entitled this chapter, O, what a tangled web we weave, with a subtitle, Power poisons the conscience. And what we're going to see here is that the Lord's chosen servants, in this case David, cannot hide their sins from him.

There are plenty of other lessons to be learned in this chapter, and we'll talk about those as we progress. We've seen prior to this, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, the Lord has made an irrevocable covenant with David, a promise concerning David and his dynasty. Even if one of David's descendants disobeys or rebels against the Lord, the Lord will be forced to discipline that individual, but the Lord is never going to set David and his dynasty aside in the way that he did Saul.

So, David has this promise, and then in 2nd Samuel 8-10, which we looked at in our last lesson, we see that David is securing the borders of Israel, and actually he's establishing a kingdom. He is conquering the surrounding peoples and making treaties with them, where he's the Lord and they're the subject, and they have to pay tribute, and so David is building a kingdom and an empire, and the Lord is with him, and things are looking pretty good. But there is a pattern that we need to recall.

If we go back to 2 Samuel, you'll recall that back in chapter 3, verse 1, we read that David was growing stronger, while the house of Saul was growing weaker. This was the time period in which David was ruling over Judah in the south, and in the north, the kingdom of Saul was still intact through his son. But David was growing stronger, and the house of Saul was growing weaker, and then the author stops and gives us what I've been calling a harem report, and we discover that David suddenly now has more than two wives.

He's got six. The story continues, and in chapter 5, we read that David's power grew as God strengthened him, and so David is having success. By this time, all of Israel has recognized him as king.

He's now ruling over a unified nation, and then lo and behold, in 2nd Samuel, chapter 5, verses 13 through 16, we have another harem report, and David is accumulating more wives. We argue that this is a violation of the Deuteronomic policy that the king of Israel is not to multiply wives. The concern in Deuteronomy is if you marry

foreign wives, they will pull your heart away from the Lord, and you'll become an idolater.

This is exactly what happens with Solomon later. That wasn't happening with David. As I like to say, he was marrying local girls.

But nevertheless, he was beginning to look more like the typical ancient Near Eastern king, complete with a harem. And of course, when you have all these wives and sons from different wives, there is the potential for controversy, dissension, and conflict within the royal court. And that's going to happen in the story as we forge ahead.

So, in 2nd Samuel, chapters 8 through 10, David is very successful. His power is growing. He's establishing a kingdom.

But I almost expect to see a harem report. Well, we don't get that, technically speaking. In 2nd Samuel 11, we're going to read about David adding another woman to his royal court, Bathsheba, and it's a story about how that happened.

And we're going to see David abusing his power, and we're going to see David looking a lot like one of these ancient Near Eastern kings. So yesterday, or in our prior lesson, it was yesterday, for those of you who are watching. We got started in chapter 11, and we pointed out that David, after winning all these great victories, sent Joab and the army out to fight against the Ammonites.

But on this occasion, David remained in Jerusalem. So, he appears to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. And we'll see that he really was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

So, let's begin reading with verse 2. 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. And then the narrator stops.

We talked in our prior lesson about how the Hebrew narrative works. In Hebrew narrative, we have a main storyline, which is typically carried along by verb forms, where you have the verb before the subject. And sometimes the storyteller will interrupt the sequence to give us offline material.

But it's important, usually. It draws attention to whatever is stated. And that's the case here.

We've got a storyline developing. David got up, he walked around, and then he saw a woman bathing. And then offline, the narrator highlights, I think, this statement.

The woman was very beautiful. So, David didn't just see a woman bathing. He saw a very beautiful woman bathing.

Now there's some things going on in this verse that we need to comment on. When it says he saw a woman, it'd be really easy just to slip over that. But literarily speaking, the last time someone saw a woman in the story, in the developing story, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, the former prophets of the Old Testament, the last time a character saw a woman, guess who that was? It was Samson.

Back in Judges, Chapter 14, he saw the Timnite girl. Of course, the Lord was kind of behind that, engineering things. But then in Chapter 16, he saw a Philistine prostitute.

And he went to her. And there's no indication that the Lord was in this at all. It's very interesting, at the end of Chapter 15, there's kind of a summary of Samson's career, minus a death account.

And we expect to see some kind of reference to the individual passing on in the end of an era. That doesn't happen. And so, we're wondering what's going on structurally.

And then in Chapter 16, we read about Samson visiting a prostitute. Well, you know from the wisdom literature, and the Proverbs in particular, prostitutes are sort of the gateway to death. And so, what we're going to get in Judges 16 is an account of Samson's death.

And so, he saw a woman. And it led to his demise. And now David is the next character in the larger story to see a woman.

And it's going to lead to his demise in many ways. The Lord's grace is going to keep David and his kingship intact because the Lord promised to do that. But nevertheless, David's story in many ways is going to be a tragedy from this point on.

And there's also another thing going on with this. Earlier in the story, in 1 Samuel 17, when David went out on the battlefield to confront the giant Goliath, he was sort of cast in the role of a new Joshua and Caleb. If you'll recall, when the Israelites took the land, Joshua and Caleb were men of great faith.

They were the only spies who said, we can do this. The rest of these Israelite spies were saying, no, no, we saw giants in the land. Joshua and Caleb were not phased by that.

And in fact, they led the Israelite conquest of Israel. And in fact, took towns where giants lived. So, Joshua and Caleb in many ways were giant killers.

And that's what David was. And so, when David appears on the scene in 1 Samuel 17, he is the new Joshua-Caleb. And this is a very positive thing.

But then, if we've got the patterns and judges in our minds, when we read here that he saw a woman, tragically, David, the new Joshua-Caleb, has become the new Samson. And that's not good. Samson's story ends in tragedy.

We also read that the woman was very beautiful. The language used here kind of mirrors; it echoes the way David was described back in 1 Samuel 16. Remember, we pointed out that the Lord told Samuel, I look at the heart, not the eyes.

But nevertheless, when David appears in the scene in the story, the narrator says David is a handsome man with good eyes, a good of appearance. And now, here is a woman who is being described in the same kind of way. And I think we could say it this way.

David's gaze has fallen on one who was every bit his physical equal. He's met his match, as it were. And so, the question arises, will he succumb to the temptation of using the power that he has now as king to take what he desires? It's very easy for people who get in the power mode and the greed mode to think, that's something I want and I'm going to take it.

And here's a woman who is his match. And he, of course, desires her. So David, in verse 3, sent someone to find out about her.

What we're going to see in the story is David is going to be sending a lot. He just has to say the word. And he has the power and the authority.

People jump and they do what he tells them to do. He sent Joab and the army down against the Ammonites. And we're going to see that verb show up time and time again.

Tragically, later, he's going to be sent and it's going to lead to the demise of his family. Unwittingly, he's going to be exercising his royal power and it's going to backfire on him as part of God's judgment against him. So, David has authority.

He has power. He sends someone to find out about her. He doesn't know who this woman is.

And the man said she was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. That should have stopped David in his tracks. She is someone else's wife.

We discover later in the list of mighty warriors that Uriah is one of David's mighty men. He's called a Hittite, so apparently he's a foreigner who's signed on, kind of like David did when he went to live with the Philistines. Nevertheless, Uriah is one of the prominent warriors of Israel and this is his wife and David should have stopped right there.

But he doesn't. The text says David sent messengers to get her. He's exercising his power.

She came to him and he slept with her. So, David basically sends messengers and the text literally reads, David sent messengers and took her. And that verb took is one that has shown up already and will continue to do so.

This illustrates the power that David has. He sends, he takes. And you may be interested, what was she thinking? Did she feel like she had to do what the king said? Maybe.

Some people will refer to this as a power rape. Trying to understand all the ins and outs of it, the text doesn't give us all the information that we would like to have, but I think the emphasis in the text is upon David, not Bathsheba. And so, David sent and he took and she came to him and he slept with her.

He had relations with her. And then there's one of these offline comments again. One of these parenthetical comments.

In fact, it is in parentheses in the NIV 2011 version from which I'm reading. Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness. So, she had just had her period, her menstrual cycle was underway.

And so, she's purifying herself from that and this is important because it informs us that if she were to get pregnant, let's just say she were to get pregnant, guess who can't be the father? Uriah the Hittite, we're going to discover, is down at the battle lines where he ought to be as one of David's mighty men with Joab and the army. David's going to have to bring him back. He's been down there.

And so, his wife has just had her period. And so, if she shows up pregnant, it can't be Uriah. And then she went back home.

So, the author is using these offline constructions to raise the tension in the story. David stayed home when the army went to fight. He was on his roof and he just happened to see a woman and she was very beautiful.

Temptation has reared its ugly head as it were. And what will David do? He succumbs to the temptation. And we're told that when he sleeps with Bathsheba, she has just had her period.

And so, there's great danger here. If she were to get pregnant, then people are going to ask questions and David's going to have a problem. Well, in verse five, the woman did conceive.

She conceived. And then ironically, she sent a message to David saying, I am pregnant. And so, David has a problem.

He has got to figure out how to solve this problem. And so, he comes up with a reasonable plan. The plan is this.

We'll call it plan A because it doesn't work and we're going to have to go to a plan B before this is over. But David decides, I need to get Uriah back here quickly. I need to get him together with his wife.

He needs to sleep with his wife. No one will know she's pregnant yet. And then when she begins to show, everyone will think that Uriah is the father and Bathsheba, if she just keeps her mouth shut, no one will know anything.

So that's the plan. It's pretty simple. We'll get Uriah back, have him sleep with his wife, and then everyone will think, including Uriah, that Uriah is the father of the child.

So, David sent this word to Joab, send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent him to David. And when Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were, and how the war was going.

Uriah probably wondered, we're not really sure what is going on in Uriah's mind in this story. How much does he know? Does he suspect anything? But it's likely that he was wondering, why am I, one of the leading soldiers in the army, why am I serving as a messenger? Anybody could have brought this information back. But then David said to Uriah, go down to your house and wash your feet.

Go down and just enjoy the comforts of home. And I think implied in that is, do whatever you like to do when you're home. Relax down there.

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. He slept there at the entrance to the palace with the other servants and he didn't go and sleep with his wife.

David had slept with his wife, but he wasn't going to do that. And so, David wants to know, David was told about this. Uriah did not go home.

So, he asks Uriah, what's going on here? Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home? Don't you miss, I think implied in this is, don't you miss your wife? You need to go down and enjoy the comforts of home, including your wife. Uriah replies to David, and this is quite a rebuke to the king at this point. This is quite a rebuke.

The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents and my commander Joab and my Lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing. So, he is standing up to the king.

And these words serve to condemn David in a couple of ways. Uriah disobeys really the king's command, but his defense is a reminder that loyalty to the Lord and his cause supersedes even royal authority. It's as if Uriah says, I'm not going to do what you tell me.

I don't care if you're the king. It's not right for me to be doing this. And while Uriah considered it wrong to sleep with his own wife while the army was engaged against the Ammonites, David didn't have any such qualms.

In fact, he'd already slept with another man's wife. So, this is quite a rebuke to David. And maybe even implied in his, why aren't you down there? You're the king.

So, David said to him, well, 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 again.

And this time, David, this is plan A part two. Plan A part one was simply to give him permission to go down and spend the night with his wife. Surely, he'll do that.

Any man would. No, well, Uriah isn't any man. Plan A part two is, well, let's get him drunk.

And he won't have full control over his will and his senses. And when he gets drunk, he'll want to be with his wife. So, David makes him drunk.

You can just kind of picture it. Come on, Uriah, have another one. And in the evening, Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants.

He did not go home. So even when he's drunk and not in full control of his thinking, nevertheless, he refuses to go down to his wife. So, David really has a problem now.

Plan A has not worked in either of its forms. And so, David decides, well, we're going to have to do something more desperate here. And so, in the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah.

So once again, David is sending. He's exercising his authority. And in this particular case, he's going to give Uriah probably a sealed document, which has Uriah's death warrant in it.

But he so trusts this guy that he knows he won't read it. He knows he won't read it. And so he gives it to Uriah, and Uriah is carrying the order for his own death back to Joab.

Little does he know this. And in it, David writes, put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.

So, the plan is for Joab to just put Uriah out there on the front lines in the assault against the Ammonite city. And then everybody withdraws so he's left isolated and he will be easily struck down at that point because he'll be outnumbered. This is a ridiculous plan if you think about it.

And it shows that sometimes when people panic, they just don't think straight. I mean, how in the world would you do this, really? What are you supposed to do? Whisper to all the soldiers, and on the signal, everybody pulls back. But don't tell Uriah.

It's just not going to work. And Joab would be implicated if he were to try to tell the troops to do this. It would be obvious that he's trying to get Uriah killed.

So, David's plan is really not, doesn't have a lot of thought behind it. He's in panic mode, but it's pretty clear to Joab what David wants done here. For whatever reason, David wants Uriah dead.

David actually uses the language, so he will be struck down and die. There are two different Hebrew words used here, nachah and mut. And those words have shown up together before.

Back in 1 Samuel 17, David used these words when he was describing how he had killed the predators who threatened the sheep. He had struck them and killed them. And he said he was going to do the same thing to Goliath, and he did.

In 1 Samuel 17. In 2 Samuel 10.18, David struck down and killed Shobach, the Aramean general. So, this combination of words has been used before for David as a

warrior, and how he has struck down and killed his enemies and those who have threatened him.

But now he's telling Joab to do this to Uriah. So, there's a tremendous contrast. Well, this combination of words has been used in some other places.

Earlier in 2 Samuel 3, Joab stabbed innocent Abner. And actually, it's the Hebrew word struck down, nachah. And Abner died, Hebrew word mut.

So, this combination of words was used when Joab murdered Abner. And it's also used of the assassins. Remember the assassins who snuck in and killed Saul's son, the innocent Ish-bosheth.

David said you've killed an innocent man in his bed. They stabbed him, they struck him, nachah, and killed, mut, innocent Ish-bosheth. So, David is here appearing in contrast to the David that we've seen before, who strikes and kills down his enemies and the enemies of the Lord.

And he's looking more like these murderers, Joab included, and these Benjaminites who struck down and killed innocent people. This does not bode well for David in this particular case. He is now being grouped with some miscreants from earlier in the story.

And this is not the David that we have grown to love that we've seen earlier, the one who fights the Lord's battles. No, he's concocting a murder here. So while Joab had the city under siege, verse 16, he knows what David wants.

David for whatever reason wants Uriah dead. Joab, I think, realizes, I can't do it the way David suggested. We just go out and everybody pulls back.

How are we even going to execute that? So, I'm just going to have to put Uriah out in the front lines where he knew the strongest defenders were. And when the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, so there's this attack by the men in the city, some of the men in David's army fell. Moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

So, mission accomplished. But other men had to die in the process. And that's the way Joab thinks.

Well, I've got to accomplish the king's will. We're going to have to have some collateral damage here. But I will accomplish what David wants.

So, Joab now wants to inform David of this. And so in verse 18, Joab sent David a full account of the battle. And he instructed the messenger.

And you have to be thinking, what was the messenger thinking as he tried to put all this together? But he instructs the messenger when you finish giving the king this account of the battle, the king's anger may flare up and he may ask you. So apparently in this battle account, we're not mentioning Uriah at this point. And I think Joab is hoping that David will pick up on the subtleties, read between the lines, and realize that Uriah has been taken care of because included in the battle report is the fact that the Israelite army went right up to the wall and then they experienced a defeat at that point.

The king might get mad when he hears this report as he thinks about the battle strategy. Joab's not sure. And he may ask you, why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? Who killed Abimelech, son of Jerubbesheth? He's talking about Abimelech back in Judges chapter 9, who got in too tight to the wall of the city that he was besieging.

And as David recalls, didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall so that he died in Tbebez? Don't you remember the account that's in our history about what happened to Abimelech? This is not a good strategy. Why did you get so close to the wall? If he asks you this, then say to him, moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead. So, it appears that what Joab is doing here, he's giving an account, he's hoping, in light of what David told him to do, that David will read between the lines and realize that the mission has been accomplished.

But Joab's not sure. He's thinking, David, the military man, the strategist, he might get mad. And he might question our strategy.

But it was this strategy that was necessary to get Uriah out of the picture. And he's hoping David will see that. But if he doesn't and gets angry, he tells the messenger, just say, moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.

If I'm the messenger, I'm thinking, how's that going to help? If he's mad, the fact that Uriah died is just going to make it worse. He's lost one of his best soldiers. So, the messenger has got to be conflicted here, wondering, I don't understand what's going on here.

So, it's interesting what the messenger does. The messenger set out. And when he arrived, he told David everything Joab had sent him to say.

The messenger said to David, the men overpowered us and came out against us in the open. But we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. We went back in close.

Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall. And some of the king's men died. And the messenger doesn't wait for David to get mad.

Remember, Joab said he might get angry if he does wait for his response. And then if his response is negative, tell him about Uriah. But instead, the messenger says, moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.

He doesn't want to mess around with a dead king. Somehow, Joab thinks this is going to calm him down. That seems to be what he's implying.

I'm just going to put that right into the report. And so this doesn't work out the way Joab wanted it to. I don't think Joab wanted, ideally, Uriah's name mentioned.

He didn't want to be implicated in that at all. But instead, he is. David tells the messenger.

So, we're wondering, is David going to get mad over this? David told the messenger, to say this to Joab. Don't let this upset you. Don't let this upset you, is the way the NIV has translated it.

It's actually, let it not be evil in your eyes. Let it not be evil in your eyes. Don't let this upset you.

The sword devours one as well as another. So, the death of Uriah has been included in the report and David is just trying to cover it here. He's trying to console Joab.

That's what it looks like. Yeah, it's a horrible thing to lose a great warrior like Uriah, but it happens in battle. Don't let it upset you.

The sword devours one as well as another. It's just the way it happens. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.

Say this to encourage Joab. Well, when Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. And after the time of her mourning was over, and I don't think it would have been too long, David had her brought to his house and she became his wife and bore him a son.

And you may be thinking, this was a kind thing for David to do. You know, she's a widow now because of him. And so he takes her in as a wife and adds her to the harem in the royal court.

No, no, no. I don't think we should look at it that way at all. David is trying to cover his tracks.

This is the last step in plan B. The first step is to get rid of Uriah. Dead men don't tell tales. And the second step is to marry the woman.

And everyone may think that, well, she got pregnant right after, on their wedding night, you know, right after they were married. Some people who are paying especially close attention might think that this is kind of a premature birth or whatever. But nevertheless, David seems to have succeeded.

But notice the last statement in verse 27. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord. It displeased him.

And actually, the text says, the thing which David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord. So that's countering what David had told Joab. Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes.

Think nothing of it. It's just collateral damage. It happens.

Be encouraged. Press the attack. We're going to lose warriors sometimes, even good ones like Uriah.

It's just the nature of battle. But then we're told that what David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord. And so that's setting us up for the next phase of this account.

So, if you think about it, what has David done here? He has violated the seventh and tenth commandments. He committed adultery with another man's wife. He coveted another man's wife.

And then in his attempt to cover his tracks, he has broken the sixth commandment about murder and the eighth about theft. So, he has violated the law of Moses and actually is guilty of capital offenses in this regard. Even though the Lord has made this unconditional or irrevocable promise to him, what does this mean? Well, the Lord also said in 2 Samuel 7, talking at that point about David's offspring, his descendant, the one who would follow him, if he disobeys me, I will be forced to discipline him severely with the rod of men.

But I will never break the relationship as I did with Saul. So, we can anticipate that David is going to have to pay a very, very big price here. I think that we also learn some truths here.

David's story illustrates some things. A lot of people view it as a story about lust and sexual sin, and it is that. But there's more to it than that.

That's kind of a superficial reading of the story. There's more to it than that. It tells us a lot about fallen human nature.

And it reminds us of some truths about God. And so here are a couple of theological truths that I think we see in the story that we're going to see elsewhere in Scripture. Fallen human nature, sinful human nature, is fundamentally flawed and capable of the most heinous crimes.

People will surprise you sometimes. You'll look at someone and think, there's a fine person. And then they do something that completely shocks you.

After assuming the throne of Israel, David had been, for the most part, the model of a godly king. He had a heart for God, as we are told earlier in the story. And when God looked at David's heart, he said, he's the one that I want.

Look at all the wonderful psalms that he wrote, where we see that heart for God coming through. But eventually, what happened? David became king, and that royal power got the best of him. And we see that developing.

And that's why I think those harem reports are to be interpreted negatively. He's looking more and more like the typical ancient Near Eastern king who had power. And that power got the best of him.

And in the end, both his successes and his failure leave us yearning for a godly leader. David is not the one, ideally. The account also reminds us of a second truth.

God is omniscient. He sees everything that human beings do, and he assesses what he sees from a moral perspective. Psalm 11, we read about how God sees all that transpires.

He often allows evil actions, but he doesn't approve of them, and he holds evildoers accountable for their behavior, David is going to find that out. So maybe we could put it this way. Power can be a breeding ground for sin.

And sin, once conceived, can consume those who try to cover it up. So this is a story about power more fundamentally, and how power and greed can corrupt individuals. And sometimes that corruption takes a sexual form, given our nature.

But it's really fundamentally about the abuse of power. And then we also discover and are reminded here that we can't hide our sin from God. He's watching, and he will hold us accountable for our behavior.

In our next lesson, we will look at the aftermath of this in 2 Samuel chapter 12.

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