

## Hanover International Worship

**August 15, 2021**

Sermon on 2 Samuel 12

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Grace be to you and peace from God the Father,  
the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters and Christ,

Today's sermon text is pure Hollywood.

The plot is exactly what sells best in every movie,  
or in any yellow press media: sex and crime. The  
best and the worst of human life in all variations.

So, imagine sitting in a movie theater.

Lean back in your red velvet seats, get out your  
popcorn, and get ready to watch the show!

Our protagonist is none other than the great King  
David. He is at his prime. He has made it.

His opponents are weakened, he has expanded  
his kingdom farther and farther. God is on his

side. David can be pleased with himself.

Being king involves many responsibilities. Not  
only politics and negotiations, not only warfare or  
peacemaking, he is also the highest judge. In  
cases of doubt, he is the last court of appeal. His  
word is the last word. His judgement counts.

So, during King David's office hours, a visitor is  
announced. Someone who wants his advice in a  
legal matter.

The visitor is no stranger to David. It's Nathan. A  
well-known public figure. Some people call him a  
prophet.

David knows him well. Nathan had, at one point,  
given him a great promise for his kingdom from  
God.

You can imagine David is really curious. What  
kind of a case is Nathan going to bring to court?  
Nathan begins to state his case:

*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.*

Just imagine the headlines in all the major tabloids: "Does this man have no conscience? This man stops at nothing. Rich man shamelessly exploits his poor neighbor's property."

A chorus of outrage over the abominable selfishness of this rich man would pour over him across all media.

When WE hear this story, we are outraged, and justly so. How can someone who is blessed with everything be so selfish and take from his poor neighbor one of the few possessions he has!

King David who has been called upon to judge this case reacts just as we do. He is furious and outraged.

This calls for a drastic punishment. The death penalty is the only appropriate punishment for such an atrocity. This man has forfeited his right to live!

*David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die!*

*He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."*

David is so outraged, there is only one thing he wants to know: Who is this man?

Who is the person that has done such an abominable thing?

Nathan's reply hits him like a bombshell.

*"You are the man!"*

WHAT?

ME? What do you mean?

Suddenly, it begins to dawn on David what Nathan is talking about.

He remembers that day, it was about a year ago. A beautiful evening. He took a walk on the rooftop terrace of his palace. What a beautiful view over the whole town of Jerusalem, with all

the lights, and the sun setting. His palace was higher than all other buildings, and he could overlook the roofs of all other houses.

His eye fell on the patio of a small nearby house. He saw a woman who was taking a bath. The ritual bath women had to take after their monthly days.

She probably had no idea that he was able to see her. But he could see her well. She was a beautiful woman.

And he was a man, a powerful man. He did not want to stop at seeing.

He had his servants bring her over and spent the night with her.

By the standards of the day, there was nothing much wrong with that. Being the king, he had the right to choose whatever woman he wanted, and we can put that sentence in the plural too: He had the right to choose whatever women he wanted.

There was no need to ask the woman for her consent. Some men might have had the decency to do so, but they were by no means required to. Women were considered legal subjects just as little as cattle or goats were.

Now in this case, there was a hitch. The woman was already married. To make matters worse, she was married to one of the king's most loyal soldiers.

Still, the whole thing might have gone unnoticed... had not this night had consequences. The woman, her name was Bathsheba, became pregnant.

David did what he could think of to hush the matter up. He invited Bathsheba's husband home from the battle, hoping he would spend time with his wife and think of the child as his own.

But Uriah, being the loyal and committed soldier he was, spent the night with the other soldiers instead of with his beautiful wife. Not something

David would have thought possible. How was he to make Uriah believe the child was his own?

David felt he had to turn to more radical measures. He sends Uriah to the foremost front of the battle. And he sends a letter with a truly evil message to the commander-in-chief: Make sure Uriah is way up in front where the battle is worst. And then all the rest of you withdraw from the frontline so he will be sure to be killed in the battle.

Not a chance for Uriah. He dies. Bathsheba is a widow. And as soon as the period of mourning is over, David marries her, and a son is born to them.

You are the man!

Nathan's words are still ringing in David's ears.

How can he reply to this?

What, ME? Nathan, I have no idea what you are talking about. Are you trying to accuse ME, the KING, of such an outrageous deed?

David could simply deny ever having committed such an atrocity. After all, Nathan was no witness. How is he to know?

Come ON, Nathan. You know what it's like... You are a man. A beautiful woman... Come on. You would have done it too. Everyone would have done it.

Oh yes, and that Uriah thing, I DID feel SO bad that he got killed in the war. But you know, that's just the way it is in war. One day it hits this one, and another day that one.

David could try to play it down, pretend it all wasn't as bad as Nathan said. He could dismiss it as something that is no worse than what everyone else does.

ME, Nathan? You didn't see this woman, taking a bath right there on her patio, dressed in nothing but what mother nature gave her. She knew exactly that I always take my evening stroll on the rooftop terrace at that time. She was asking for it.

You can't blame me for that. She was the one who pulled out all the stops.

And Uriah? That old fool hasn't deserved any better. Why didn't he take better care of his missus? Slept out with in the tents with the other soldiers instead of going home to his beautiful wife! I mean, how silly can you be! You can't leave a beautiful woman like that by herself for so long, you gotta keep an eye on her.

David could have blamed others. Just like human beings do right from the beginning:

Me? No, it was that woman who gave me the fruit!

Me? No, it was that snake that persuaded me to eat from that tree!

David could deny everything.

He could try to play it down.

Or he could blame others.

There are many ways David could have tried to save face in front of Nathan.

What would I do if I were in David's spot?

How would I reply to Nathan? Quite honestly?

David does none of the above. He replies, simply and plainly, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Short and sweet. Well, not sweet.

The king himself confesses to be guilty.

He clears way for forgiveness.

Nathan can grant him God's forgiveness. His guilt shall not burden him forever.

Forgiveness can happen where we confess our guilt instead of denying it, playing it down, blaming it on others.

And maybe the opposite is true too:

We are free to confess our guilt since we can hope for forgiveness. As long as we fear punishment, as long as we fear to be blamed for our guilt for the rest of our lives, we will shy back from actually confessing our guilt.

David does confess his guilt.

And Nathan can grant him God's forgiveness.

So far, so good.

Yet, this is no Hollywood style happy ending.

There are puzzles left unsolved in this story.

Is this a full, complete forgiveness or only some sort of partial forgiveness? Why do totally

innocent people get drawn into this? Why does

Uriah have to die? Why does no one throughout the whole story ever ask about Bathsheba? What

are her feelings, did she feel flattered and excited that the king himself desired her? Or was this

whole thing more like a rape possibly?

And why does that totally innocent child of this affair have to die? Why is the child being

punished? Why is Bathsheba, who is never asked for her will throughout the story, punished

again by the death of her child?

There are too many questions left open to call this a happy ending.

There is too much injustice left, too much wrong in this story. The way God himself acts in this story remains hard to understand.

"You are the man!"

This is not a story for the movie theater. It doesn't leave us sitting comfortably in our red velvet chairs.

"You are the man!"

This story jumps out at us from the movie theater screen. David, who had been sitting back comfortably in the audience, suddenly realizes that this is about HIM. "You are the man!"

The story jumps out at us just as we have settled down comfortably in our audience seats. This is about ME! "You are the man!" (Or the woman.)

This is not about someone else. This is not about comfortably and judgmentally watching from a safe distance.

This is not about what someone else has done wrong. This is not about the person sitting next to me. This is about ME!

The bible is not a collection of Hollywood stories we can read or watch comfortably from a safe

distance. These stories jump out at me from the book covers. This is about ME!

In our gospel reading we heard the parable Jesus tells about the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee knows that there are light-years between himself and the tax collector in terms of righteousness.

Now who is the person we identify with in this story? Well, that's quite obvious, isn't it? Not the Pharisee of course. We are on the side of the tax collector who may have done wrong but who goes home justified and righteous.

There are light-years between us and the Pharisee in terms of righteousness!

There is a poem by the German poet Eugen Roth that expresses this wonderfully. Now as you all know, a poem is literally impossible to translate. Now we have a translator in our midst who accomplished the impossible and translated this poem for us. I am indebted to Tony Mellor-

Stapelberg for this wonderful translation – thank you, Tony!

*A man perused attentively  
The story of that Pharisee  
Who, praying near a publican,  
Thanked God he was a better man.  
The reader said, in vanity,  
'Thank God I'm not a Pharisee!'*

*[Ein Mensch betrachtete einst näher  
die Fabel von dem Pharisäer,  
der Gott gedankt voll Heuchelei,  
dafür, daß er kein Zöllner sei.  
Gottlob, spricht er in eitalem Sinn,  
daß ich kein Pharisäer bin!]*

In order to receive God's forgiveness, we first of all need to confess before him that we are guilty. Before him – and before ourselves. That may be the hardest part of all, to admit to myself that I have failed.

That my life is not like God would want it to be.

If I admit this to myself and to God, I am opening up the way for forgiveness.

And through Jesus we know that this is not going to be a partial forgiveness but a full, complete one. Jesus did not die partially for a partial forgiveness only. He did not say to the adulteress "Your sins are partially forgiven".

God's forgiveness through Jesus is complete.

He is not going to rub it in forever. He is not going to pick on us forever and keep on blaming us.

Therefore, we can risk confessing it.

Let's do it. Let's get out of our audience seats and stop being mere onlookers.

Let's accept God's full forgiveness for ourselves.

Amen.