

Grace and Consequence

"There was an evangelist who used to preach around the world. His name was Sammy Tippit. On one trip he was traveling through Communist eastern Europe. Somehow he had gained permission to hold evangelistic services that often met in outdoor sports stadiums. He tells how it would often be raining on the day of the meetings. His group would gather and pray that the rain would stop so that people would come to the services, and often times the rain would stop. It was a testimony to the power and love of God for the people of those countries.

On one occasion Mr. Tippit and his group were traveling by bus across the border into another country. The border guard came onto the bus and saw several rugs that Mr. Tippit had purchased from different countries to take home as souvenirs. The guard took notice of one of the rugs and where it was from and demanded that a large tax be paid to take it across the border. The guard then left the bus. It was the rug that Mr. Tippit liked the best.

The group discussed the problem and one person suggested that Mr. Tippit switch the tags with a less desirable rug and leave that rug there. They would be deceiving the border guard, but he probably did not have any right to charge this tax anyway. It all got quiet and they thought about it for a moment and then a voice could be heard from the back of the bus, coming from one of the older men in the group. Mr. Tippit, you could switch the tags on the rugs if you would like, and deceive the guard, but I bet the next time we pray for the rain to stop, it doesn't."

This is a story of blessing and obedience. A story of grace and consequence. In the Bible we find a similar story.

In the Old Testament we read an extraordinary story of a man named David from the town of Bethlehem. He began life as a shepherd boy, the youngest of 8 sons. One evening, when he was a teenager, Samuel, the prophet of Israel came to David's simple home, bypassed his older brothers and anointed David as the next king of Israel. 1 Samuel 13:14 tells us "*The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people. . .*" David was this man. It would be years before he would actually become king, but God had already placed a call on his life.

As a shepherd boy, with the help of God, David killed a lion and a bear, while protecting his sheep. As a young man he killed the Philistine giant Goliath who repeatedly blasphemed the name of God. David's faith was strong and God used him to lead the Israelite army to victory in many battles. Although his story started well, there would later be years of difficulty as God prepared David's character to match the assignment that God had for him.

Finally, the words of the prophet came to pass and David became king over all of Israel. David had it all. Power, wealth, freedom, and God's blessing. What more could he want? He had it all and David became a great king but everything changed in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. The scriptures tell us the following story.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. ³ And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" ⁴ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

⁶ So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰ When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" ¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing." ¹² Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵ In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from

him, that he may be struck down, and die.”¹⁶ And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men.¹⁷ And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. . .

²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband.²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

12 And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor.² The rich man had very many flocks and herds,³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him.⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die,⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

⁷ Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul.’⁸ And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.⁹ Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his

wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’” ¹³ David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.” ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

And the LORD afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick (and died).

²⁴ Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the LORD loved him.

What a tragedy? God had given David so much and was ready to give him even more, but he wasted it all in one night of lust and passion and then covered it up by having the husband killed.

In the years after this, one of King David's sons would rape one of his daughters. Another son would kill this son in rage and revenge. A son would start a rebellion and almost take the whole kingdom from King David. King David's life and family, in many ways would unravel and descend into chaos.

The story causes some to ask, wasn't David's God's chosen one? How could he do something like this? How could his life have such a terrible ending?

But if one continues to read, we see that it was not the end of the story.

In Psalm 51 we read about David's total repentance before God which prepared the way for God's continued work in his life.

In the midst of David's later struggles he continued to worship God, to cling to His Word, and walk faithfully through the consequences of his sin.

Throughout the psalms we see glimpses of David's worshipping heart, his inquiring of the Lord and in the end His passion that the temple would be built for God's glory in Jerusalem and that Israel would continue to walk in the ways of God, long after he was gone.

In the life of David we find consequence sandwiched between the grace that came before and the grace that came after.

In Acts 13, written centuries after King David lived, the apostle Paul spoke of God's perspective of David.

²² And he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' ²³ Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.

How can David be called a "man after God's heart" after the sins that he committed? How could God allow Jesus to be the descendant of David after David had sinned in such a grievous manner? How could God say that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David forever. Shouldn't sin disqualify David from being part of the story of God?

Those are all great questions whose answers begin to show us the size of God's grace.

Moses murdered a man. Abraham slept with his servant girl to have a child when God's promised child through Sarah was delayed. Rahab had been a prostitute before eventually becoming the mother-in-law of Ruth and the great-great grandmother of King David. The apostle Paul had persecuted Christians, some who even lost their lives. The Bible is filled with stories of God reconciling a sinful people to Himself. Sin had consequences but it was also met with grace.

From this verse in Acts 13 we see that being a "man after God's own heart" was synonymous with David's willingness to do all of God's will. David was a man of faith whose desire was to follow God's will completely, but at times he failed.

It was much like the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. "I don't do what I want to do, and what I don't want to do, I do." Paul was grieving over his sin.

That is the heart of an authentic follower of Christ. We all sin, but how do we respond after we sin? When someone is a person after God's own heart, they will be convicted of their sin and will respond with confession, remorse, repentance and reconciliation. A faithful follower of Christ hates the struggle with temptation and sin and continues to cry out for forgiveness and deliverance. This person's heart will be turning more and more towards God and away from sin.

Those who do not have a heart for God will justify their sin. They will refuse responsibility for their sin. They will blame others for their sin. They will refuse to reconcile.

Scripture reveals that David sinned, and there were consequences for his sin. His family was plagued by problems that resulted from the sin of David, their father.

But after his sin and his failure and the consequences, his heart turned back towards God. And God received him, much like the father in the story of the prodigal son.

The same way that He receives us when we turn from our sin with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

It is the unthinkable grace of God that sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay for our sin so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God.

As we think back through this story there are several truths that we must not forget.

All sin is ultimately against God. Because of this we are responsible to Him. In Psalm 51:4 we read David's words, "*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*" Our sin is often against other people, but ultimately our sin is first and foremost against God and He will hold us accountable.

Grace forgives but may not remove the consequences of our sin. 2 Samuel 12:13-14 states that, "*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.'*"

It is possible for us to be forgiven, but it still be necessary for us to endure the consequences of our sins. Many times it was these negative consequences that God wanted us to avoid when he directed us towards holiness.

For example, watching pornography can be forgiven but one will continue to struggle against the images that are present in his or her mind. A moment of misled materialism can be forgiven but paying off the credit card may take months or even years. Moments of abuse and unfaithfulness can be forgiven, but the trust that has been lost will take a long time to rebuild. Forgiveness is available, but sin has consequences.

God's grace cannot be abused. Galatians 6:7 speaks very directly into this issue. "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."

Many times in the past we have sinned and think that we have gotten away with it, but we didn't get away with anything. Scripture tells us that a price was paid for our sin on the cross by Jesus Christ. Though we might have avoided punishment in the present the penalty was paid.

As people who believe strongly in the grace of God we must be careful to not be drawn away from holiness and a healthy fear of God. An attitude that walks in sin, thinking that we will just ask for forgiveness later, exposes a heart that either doesn't truly know Christ or at least a heart that has drifted far from Him.

It is helpful to remember the words from Hebrews 4:13 and Romans 6:1-2. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account." "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Living a Holy Life Requires a Daily Dependence on God

We live in the midst of a spiritual battle. We are bombarded by temptations from the world around us and also led towards sin by the desires within us.

It is only in persistent dependence on God that we are protected. It is one thing to have access to the armor of God it is another thing to put it on and walk in it. Be warned, many Christians, even Christian leaders have fallen to sin. If we could sit and talk with them we would find that they had drifted from the intimacy with God and were left, unprotected and desensitized to sin. Christ was no longer their first love. As their delight in God

waned their desires followed the flesh and their evil desires led them into temptation and sin.

It is only as we daily nurture our relationship with Christ and draw near Him that we gain all the protection and blessing that He provides.

Grace Gets the Last Word – The story of David began with the grace of God and then was interrupted by the sin of David. All seemed to be loss, but we must look to the lasting effects of God’s work in David’s life after his sin and repentance.

David would go on to be king for 40 years and was the greatest king that Israel ever had. David continued inquiring of the Lord, for the rest of his life. In the psalms that David wrote he continued to write from a heart of faith, gratitude, worship and a love for God’s Word.

Although the first son of David and Bathsheba died, their next son was Solomon who grew to be a great king of Israel as well. Even though David’s sin against God and Uriah was great, God’s grace was greater. Grace got the last word. Into David’s lineage would be born an even greater King, Jesus Christ, our Savior, who will sit on the throne of David forever.

As I think back through this story of David and his sin, one verse really captures my attention. It is when God recounted of how many blessings He had already given David and then said, *“And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.”*

O, the regret that must have brought to David’s heart. The consequence his sin brought and the blessings that were forfeited.

Like David, God has already blessed us with so much more than we deserve, and if we walk in holiness he is prepared to give us so much more.

May we not live lives of regret and consequence. Instead may we allow the grace of God to lift us above our sin where grace always gets the last word.