

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus Christ. Bring us to the place where we know our faith and have confidence in all You have done for us. May we never avoid the tough demands which our faith makes on us, either practically, spiritually or mentally, and bring us at last to Your home in glory, where we can know that our faith is complete in You: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Broken Families

Pray for all who are trying to mend broken relationships within their families. Pray that Gods people might be those who seek reconciliation and be an example of the power of love.

On-going prayers

- *Give thanks to God for the Sabbath and the importance of rest*
- *Pray for scientists whose work is to monitor the health of our planet*
- *Pray for the housebound and chronically sick who live near you*

Meditation

We have been created for love
So let us be seen to love one another
We have been created to be passionate
So let us live our lives to the full
We have been created for fellowship
So let us value each other's company
We have been created to be fruitful
So let us use all the gifts we have been given
We have been created for fulfilment
So let us live our lives with purpose
We have been created to be productive
So let us be dynamic and fully employed
We have been created to be spiritual
So let us be given over to the eternal purposes of God.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 12:1-6

¹ 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 bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer 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.'

Review

If you have followed the story of David with me over weekends of the last few month, you will feel deeply saddened by the actions of David in His adultery with Bathsheba. Throughout his rich life he was portrayed as one who was in touch with God, both filled with the Spirit for the mighty works of God, and also sensitive to what was right and wrong. So perhaps it is because of his previous faithfulness and upright reputation that when he did fall, he fell very badly. The adultery with Bathsheba compromised not just his personal standing at court and his morality before the law (committing not just adultery but murder), but it also compromised the covenant relationship God had recently established with David by which he had been promised that one of his dynasty would be the leader of God's people for ever (2 Sam 7:12ff). In the light of his many sons, his many wives and his clear love of Bathsheba, which son of his would bear the great covenant?

Nathan, the prophet who had recently spoken to David concerning the great Messianic covenant, was the man God used to deal with the situation; so he approached David prepared to deal with the situation. 'The Lord sent Nathan to David' says our passage (12:1). It was the normal and proper function of a prophet to call to account the kings of Israel and Judah. Samuel and succeeding prophets were responsible for anointing the kings (1 Sam 10:1, 16:13 etc) and also conveying the Lord's word to them both when they asked for it, and when they did not, as here in this passage.

The parable of the lamb The story Nathan told was simple and straightforward, and it is called the 'parable of the lamb'. It reminds us of stories Jesus told contrasting the life of the rich and the poor (the rich man and Lazarus, for example – Luke 16:19)! However, in this story, the rich man had everything he needed for a comfortable life and the means to satisfy not only himself but also to meet all his social obligations, including hospitality. As we read, we are under no illusions that the rich man is David, but David could not immediately see what was obvious. Nathan continued to tell the story.

The poor man had one 'ewe lamb', which scripture describes as being treated like a pet in the family home. This sounds a little odd to us because most people would not keep farm animals as pets, but the cosy and homely picture presented by Nathan would have been quite understandable in an ancient home in which animals lived in one section of the building, and people in another; the dividing line between the two sometimes being less than clear. The rich man, however, took the ewe lamb from its owner, and proceeded to use it to provide a meal for a stranger. This was a typically hospitable gesture, but the rich man was not prepared to pay the proper price for the lamb, he simply took it. This would have been a cruel blow to the poor man, because by removing the lamb, the rich man had taken away the poor man's future as well as his present. The lamb, being female, would have borne lambs in due course that may have enabled the poor man to escape further poverty. The poor man was robbed of more than his ewe lamb.

David's blindness David heard the story and responded appropriately by expressing anger at the injustice of it all. However, David was so trapped in personal denial of all he had done wrong; he did not suspect the message was for him! He initially thought it was about someone else, and he thought the prophet was telling him the story so that he, the great King David, might act for justice and pronounce restitution by demanding 'fourfold' (12:6) from the guilty party.

There is little purpose in drawing out any details of the parable, because we can easily see all the allegorical connections between David and the rich man, and Uriah and the poor man. The allegory is not accurate or complete, but it was sufficient for the purpose, which was to shake David out of his blindness. Nathan's method of confronting David was initially non-confrontational, and risked being misunderstood, but we will see tomorrow how Nathan

subsequently confronted David to make him realise his mistakes. One could say that Nathan used good 'counselling' technique well ahead of his time! But why should we credit modern counselling methodology with what the Bible describes as godly wisdom on the part of the prophet? Here, the key to dealing with David's appalling crime began with Nathan's obedience to the Lord in telling the story. It was as if the faith of the prophet had to stand where David's own relationship with his God had been; but where his evil actions had created a gap between himself and the Lord. The way for David to overcome what had happened was firstly to recognise what he had done, and then through the guidance of the prophet, he would be able to deal with his sins and move on.

Today's passage may be a simple and straightforward story, but we should not ignore its implications. Would that God might raise up prophets today who will follow God's Word, do and say His will, stand in the gap of faith which yawns above too many of His people, deal with situations according to the Lord's will and direction, and assist people to repentance and change of heart for the good of all. Would that God might do this work amongst the rich of the world!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. The parable of the little ewe lamb exposed David's sin. Allegorically, does it beg questions about the life of God's people today?
2. Do you regard the work of the prophet in this story to be typical of what a prophet does? What would be the equivalent prophetic work today?
3. David was blind to his problems; to what extent do people tend to be hypocritical and blind to sin?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Much is said and done in church on the basis of presumption rather than fact. We all assume that people we meet in church on Sundays are good people who do not sin, and the very thought that they might would appear to be offensive! If we look at ourselves, however, we should in all honesty accept that no one is immune from the clutches of sin, and although everyone in church is a very different character, the one thing we have in common is that like David, we sin (though not necessarily his particular sin!). It is when people accept their common sinfulness that God's church can begin to grow, building on the basis of a truly shared faith in the Saviour. If we have not confessed our sins, we have not begun the journey, and the work of the prophet, as in this story, is to lead us there.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Pray for those who find it hard to accept the real challenge of Christian faith, to deal with sin in their life by recognising it and submitting it to God in prayer. Ask yourself whether you are as honest about this matter as you should be!*
- *Ask the Lord to show you whether you should be thinking of yourself as a 'rich' or a 'poor' person, whether spiritually or materially. Some of our attitudes towards life come from how we perceive ourselves rather than the truth in God's eyes.*

Final Prayer

Jesus, Saviour of the world, You were lifted up on a Cross to draw people of all races and nations to Yourself. Bless the witness of Your church in every place, and help Your people finish the work You have given them to do. We ask this in Your victorious name: AMEN