

# I.D.'d

Sermon Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-9

Bruce Hedgepeth

October 19, 2014

## I. Missing the mark

A couple of times a year our church staff takes a few hours to do a “fun” activity together. The most recent time was at the end of September when we went bowling. Let me just say that you can rest assured – we won’t be losing any of our staff members to the professional bowlers’ tour. You’re likely aware that a perfect game in bowling, rolling a strike in every frame, yields a score of 300. Well, most of the staff bowled two games each and only once did anyone break 150. We weren’t very impressive in the bowling alley.

But even if you’re not good, bowling can teach you important life lessons. When I learned to bowl as a kid, my dad taught me that the ball would go in the direction my thumb was pointing when I released it. So if I turn my hand over to the left – the ball will hit the pins far to the left of the head pin. If my hand flops over to the right – the ball will go that way and not very many pins will fall down. And if I keep my thumb aligned straight down the middle of the alley what will happen? That’s right – I’ll hit the head pin directly and end up with a “7-10 split.” It’s almost impossible to pick up a spare when you’ve left only two pins standing and they’re on opposite sides of the alley.

There is, however, this one sweet spot. As a right-handed bowler, if I can point my thumb just to the right of the head pin so the ball makes impact in the

pocket between that head pin and the number three pin – I stand a good chance of getting a strike. That ball will be right on target. I will have hit the mark.

Did you know that in both the Old and New Testaments when we come across the English word “sin” that one of the main meanings of either the Hebrew or Greek word behind it is “missing the mark”? Biblically speaking, sin is about missing the sweet spot that God intends for us in life. It’s about doing less and even being less than our heavenly Father has dreamed for us. Sin is about knocking down fewer pins than we’re capable of doing. It’s about dealing with a “7-10 split” that is very hard to recover from. Sin is about missing the mark. We don’t necessarily intend to be off target. Sometimes we just slip to one side or the other. Before we know it, we’ve strayed far from where we want to be.

## **II. You are the man!**

It seems to me that’s the way it happened for David in the events that preceded our text for this morning. As bad as the stuff was that David did, I don’t believe he set out to commit adultery with Bathsheba or to order his military commander, Joab, to make sure that Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, was killed in battle so David could take the widow as his wife. I don’t think it was David’s intention to miss the mark as badly as he did. But one bad, off target, decision led to another and, before he knew it, David, who the Bible calls “a man after God’s own heart,” had done more wrong than he probably ever thought possible. So how did he miss the mark so badly?

Well, if you were here last week, you may remember that we left off in our journey through God’s great story in the Bible with Joshua and his challenge to the Israelites as they established themselves in the Promised Land: “Choose this day who you will serve, but as for me and my house – we will serve the Lord.” And if you’ve been following along with the readings this week, which I

encourage us all to do so we can take this journey through scripture together, then you know that we continued the story with Samuel. Even before he was born, his mother, Hannah, dedicated him to serve God. Samuel grew up to be the Lord's prophet at a time when the people of Israel demanded a king so they could be like all the other nations. It was Samuel who anointed Israel's first king – Saul. It was Samuel who witnessed the tragedy of Saul's leadership: his fits of depression; his jealousy; and his eventual death in battle. It was Samuel who anointed David as the new king whom God had chosen. Saul killed his thousands in battle, scripture tells us, but David killed his ten thousands. The shepherd boy became a war hero and then he became the king of Israel.

This morning our journey through the Bible continues the story in a strange place – 2 Samuel 12. It's a strange place because it leaves out all the sordid description of what David had done prior to a visit from Samuel's successor as God's prophet – Nathan. But if you look back to the beginning of the previous chapter, 2 Samuel 11, you will find these curious words in the very first verse: "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem." Did you catch that? It's just one sentence tucked at the end 2 Samuel 11:1 – David remained in Jerusalem. This brave warrior who had single-handedly faced down the Philistine giant, Goliath, with a sling and five smooth stones; this commanding military leader who had killed his ten thousands in battle; this man after God's own heart who became king and made Israel a regional power – when it was time to go back out to fight, David decided to stay behind in Jerusalem.

It probably didn't seem like a big deal at the time, but he missed the mark. He didn't do what he should have done. David wasn't where he was supposed to be as king. And one bad decision led to another and another and

another. While strolling around the roof of his palace David saw a woman bathing. That wasn't really the problem. The problem was that he kept looking. He noticed she was beautiful and looked some more. Before long that look turned to lust and David, who was king of all Israel and had several wives, sent for Bathsheba, the wife of one of the men serving in his army, and he committed adultery with her. David missed the mark. To make matters worse, he missed the mark further by trying to cover up his sin. When the cover up failed, David made the situation worse by having Bathsheba's husband assigned to a place in battle that would almost certainly ensure his death – it did. Then David took Bathsheba as his wife. He really missed the mark. One sin led to another and another and another.

In our passage for this morning, David seems to think that he's gotten away with missing the mark as much as he did. He believes that he's done what's nearly impossible and picked up the "7-10 split." Enter the prophet Nathan. He tells the king a story about a rich man with huge flocks of sheep and a poor man with one female lamb. Nathan describes for David how the rich man took the one little lamb from the poor man because he could. The king is enraged by the injustice of the rich man towards the poor man and declares that the scoundrel deserves the death sentence. To which the prophet replies to David: "You are the man!" You have I.D.'d yourself. You, O king, are the one, with your wealth and power and many wives, who took for himself the one wife of a soldier in your service. You are the man upon whom you have pronounced a death sentence.

### **III. I have sinned against the Lord**

I think a natural reaction when we get to this point in the story is for us to say to ourselves: "You go, Nathan, tell that nasty King David what a bad guy he

is. After all, he's committed adultery. He's lied and tried to cover it up when Bathsheba told him she was pregnant. When the cover up failed, he made matters even worse by effectively murdering Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. You tell him, Nathan. I'm sure glad you pronounced God's judgment against that coveter and adulterer and liar and murderer." We can find ourselves being thankful that we're not bad like David was.

Except that we are. It became clear to me a number of years ago in a training I was leading on prayer ministry in another church. Dozens of good people, faithful church-goers, and committed leaders in that congregation were present. At one point in the training I was attempting to make a point about the kinds of things that are alright to say and others that aren't alright to say in prayer ministry. Thinking I was offering a ridiculous example, I picked out an elderly woman who we'll call Dorothy and asked; "Now if I was praying for Dorothy and God gave me the visual impression of a scarlet "A" hovering over her head, referring to Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel about Hester Prynne's adultery, is that something I should share with her?" The answer to my question was "no" but that was not the important thing. The important thing was after the training was over Dorothy stayed to speak with me. She wanted me to know that my "ridiculous" example was, in fact, true. Earlier in her life she had been involved in an extramarital affair and it was important to her to tell the truth about it.

That evening, I learned that when the prophet Nathan identified King David with the words: "You are the man!" He I.D.'d me and he I.D.'d you. Whether it's coveting or lying or adultery or whatever, if his words were true for that sweet, older woman, they are true for me and they are true for you: "You are the man!" "You are the woman!" As the Apostle Paul puts it Romans 3:23: "...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We are that person – just like David was.

Thankfully, the story doesn't end with the verses we read today. It is true that there were tragic consequences for David's sin. The son born to him and Bathsheba died. Violence and deception plagued David's family for most of his life. But the king's humble response to Nathan's convicting words was even more powerful than the effect of his sin. We find those words in verse 13: "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" He confessed his sin. He admitted his guilt. He recognized how badly he had missed the mark. And the Lord forgave David.

Friends, God is still in the forgiving business today. Whatever you may have said, whatever you may have done, when you respond to the prophet's convicting words: "You are the man," "You are the woman," with penitence like David's: "I have sinned against the Lord," God will forgive you as well. That's a promise we find in 1 John 1:8-9: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness." Yes, we have all been I.D.'d in our sin, in how far we have missed the mark. But when we confess our sin before God like David did and place our trust in Christ Jesus, we find forgiveness. We find freedom. We find that sweet spot in life. Thanks be to God.