

Caught Red Handed

The Singer, Part 14

2 Samuel 12

USA Today ran an article a couple of weeks ago. According to the article, “One of the largest-ever roundups in the history of New York City took place – an elaborate investigation that resulted in the arrest of dozens of people – dozens, if not hundreds more, were caught involved in child pornography distribution.

This was front page news – and what made it even more startling was the fact that mug shots of several key people who were arrested now graced the front page of USA Today.

They all had the same look on their faces – stunned . . . silent – their computers pointed the finger at their guilt.

And then it got even more alarming; many of the people involved were people you would expect could be trusted – should be trusted.

Among those arrested and put on the front page of the newspaper, picture and all, was a police chief along with another police officer; then a nurse; and a paramedic; and a grey bearded, middle aged Jewish Rabbi.

The article informed that “more than 600 desktop computers were seized, including laptops, tablets, smart phones and other devices – some of whom contained thousands of images and videos.”ⁱ

Images and video that now pointed a finger of incrimination . . . of undeniable evidence.

We would say that these people had been caught, red handed and it won’t take long before their verdict of guilt is read.

I did a little research on that expression of being caught red handed.

It appeared for the first time, at least in written form in the Scottish Acts of Parliament in 1432 under the reign of King James I.

It was a new law that attempted to deal swiftly and justly with poachers on who were shooting the deer on other people’s property.

The law read that, “If the offender be taken [caught] red hand[ed], he may be pursued and put to the knowledge of the Landlord.”ⁱⁱ

The red hand was a reference to the evidence of blood on the poacher’s hands. Caught in the act . . . undeniable evidence.

He was “caught red handed”.

A little more than 300 years later, Sir Walter Scott’s novel, *Ivanhoe*, popularized this expression when the Sir Walter referred to hunter caught with the blood of a deer he had poached . . . Walter Scott referred to him as being caught red handed.

I found it interesting that this expression has been used over the centuries in other cultures as well.

In Japan, temple monks centuries ago would paint their money with an invisible coating of sap from poison ivy so that any thief would eventually break out in a terrible, itchy red rash – he’d be detected by his red hands.

Back in England, the red coats of England’s top tier soldiers – still worn to this day at Buckingham palace – these coats were often stolen from the wool mills . . . and because of their value – especially centuries ago – they would be stolen while hanging to dry just after being dyed red. Of course, the thieves could be spotted because it took some time for the red stains to be washed off their hands.

I also discovered that English nobles would often dip their expensive pistachios in a clear dye so that if

their servants stole any of them, their fingertips and tongues would be stained a bright red.

Being caught red handed has traveled down the ages to our own generation – referring to someone caught, either in the act, or with the evidence of their crime still in their possession.

So being caught red handed has become a metaphor for being caught and without any excuse . . . denial is pointless . . . you are literally stained, as it were, with the evidence of wrong doing.

And there isn't any testimony more powerful, besides blood on your hands, than a reliable eye witness.

In our last study we watched the elaborate cover up by King David.

He had taken another man's wife for one night . . . assuming he'd never be found out. Trouble is, she became pregnant. And instead of revealing the truth, David plunged into a downward spiral of cover up that eventually led to a conspiracy with his top general and the death of the woman's husband while in battle.

2 Samuel 11 informs us that after the traditional period of mourning for the loss of Uriah, this faithful soldier, which would have been 7 days long, David marries the widow Bathsheba and assumes nobody is the wiser.

But there are effectively eye witnesses – Joab the General; Bathsheba the pregnant widow . . . and another very reliable, overlooked eyewitness.

God.

Chapter 11 ends with the statement, ***But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord (11:27)***

The surprising thing is that God won't do anything until sometime a year later – even though He can clearly see the blood on David's hands.

By now the gossips at the palace had quit talking about what David had done . . . they had figured it out . . . a few cynics were still complaining, "I told you nothing would happen to David!"ⁱⁱⁱ

It looked like David had literally gotten away with adultery and murder.

But just in case you're thinking he did, and now he's having the time of his life – think again.

He will later admit in one of his classic Psalms what life was really like for him during this period of covering up his sin. In that Psalm – ***Psalm 32 – David writes, Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven . . . for when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all***

day long. For day and night your hand (oh God) was upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer (32:1-4)

In other words, as one commentary put it, "David wasn't relaxing and taking life easy, sipping lemonade on his patio, during the aftermath of his adultery and murder. Count on it . . . he had sleepless nights. He could see his sin written across the ceiling of his room as he tossed and turned. He saw it written across the walls. He saw it on the plate where he tried to choke down his meals. He saw it on the faces of his counselors. He was a miserable husband, an irritable father, a poor leader, and a songless composer. He was living a lie, but he could not escape the truth."^{iv}

This delay in confronting David was all in the Divine providence of God's timing.

David was miserable . . . the passing pleasure of sin had long since passed . . . according to his Psalm, he couldn't shake the guilt and shame . . . and that's a mark, by the way, of a genuine believer.

The lamb who slips into a mud puddle might enjoy the cool liquid for a moment before it struggles to get out; a pig will slip into a mud puddle and say to himself, "Oh man, I'm finally home . . . this is what life is all about."

The children of God are never completely comfortable with sin.^v

The timing of God is perfect . . . it's been a year now . . . David has hidden his sin long enough . . . it's time to send the prophet Nathan into the courtroom of King David.

Notice chapter 12 and verse 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, 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.

Nathan is really pouring it on, isn't he? He's using strong emotional language to describe the bond between this little lamb and this poor man and his family. Did you notice, he's doing things for this little lamb you probably wouldn't even do your for your favorite pet, right? He's letting it eat right off his plate and drink right out of his cup.

You wouldn't let your dog do that.

Your cat would do it without asking . . . you wouldn't have a choice – then he'd demand refills.

Nathan is also using words loaded with implication. In fact, the phrase in *verse 3* that this little lamb *lay in his arms* is the same expression commonly used for a man embracing his wife. And the next phrase that this lamb was *like a daughter* – is actually the same Hebrew word which begins the name of Bath – sheba.^{vi}

The lamb was like a Bath to him.

You can't help but believe that David's conscience is being pricked even now by Nathan's words.

Notice verse 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.

Again, Nathan's choice of words proves he'd thought this out over some time. The word for *traveler* is literally someone who is walking around.

It's the same word used in chapter 11 for David who was *walking around* on his rooftop when he spotted Bathsheba.

But David doesn't connect the dots just yet.

In fact, this parable sends David into a rage.^{vii}

Look at verse 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, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thin and because he had no pity."

Don't miss this . . . David is literally sentencing himself!^{viii}

But before we go there, isn't it interesting to see in David our own ability to condemn others for doing less than what we've done ourselves?

How is it that we can see a splinter in someone else's eye but we can't see the beam of wood protruding from our own eye? (*Matthew 7*).

The splinter and the beam of wood are made out of the same thing – the only difference is the amount of wood. In other words, the person who sins the most in some area is able to spot the same sin in someone else's life even though it's only a fraction of his own.

And he revels in judgment.

This man stole something – what was it? A lamb.

David stole something – what was it? A wife. And then another man's life.

David says, "That sheep stealer deserves the death penalty."

Why?

- Because he stole something he already had plenty of?
- Because he acted without pity toward someone who couldn't defend himself?
- Because he used his power to do whatever he wanted?
- Because he ripped a family apart with grief?

Yes . . . all of the above!

And David comes off his throne and sputters, "**As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die!**"

You can just imagine Nathan pausing for effect . . . while the sentence of David echoes around the palace walls.

And then he looked David in the eye and said – *verse 7 – You are the man* . . . that rich man is you.

I can imagine, with other expositor's and authors, that David's jaw probably dropped open; he blinked a couple of times and stared at Nathan – first inquisitively – then perhaps his eyes widened in sudden recognition . . . he slumped back to his throne as his heart beat against his chest . . . he didn't know that anyone knew . . . the secrets were out . . . of course . . . God knew . . . and the prophet had just spoken for God.

He had been caught red handed. Although visible stains were hidden and everything seemed normal, God had seen everything that even now was staining David's heart.

Stains that had already begun to eat, like corrosive rust, into the heart and mind and spirit of a guilty King.

Is there something you're hoping never gets out? Is there a stain you're hoping never gets detected? Is there evidence somewhere you're hoping never surfaces?

What if a prophet of God by the name of Nathan arrived at your doorstep this afternoon . . . what would happen to the palms of your hands and the beating of your heart?

One author told the interesting story of Rogers Cadenhead. When Pope John Paul II died, Rogers took a chance and purchased the web domain registered www.BenedictXVI.com and then waited. He guessed correctly and waited until Rome discovered they needed it when the new pope chose that very name.

He watched as another name popebenedict16.com sold on Ebay for \$16,000. He figured his property would be worth much more.

But then, in a surprising twist, he informed the Catholic officials who came knocking that he didn't want money. He was a Catholic himself and wanted the church to have the domain. Instead, he wanted a free night in the Vatican hotel and complete absolution, no questions asked, for the third week of March, 1987.^{ix}

It definitely makes you wonder what happened that week, in 1987.

All this man wanted was the guilt to go away and his sins absolved.

Are you hiding something from God . . . and others?

- Is it a business practice God would never honor, nor your spouse for that matter?
- Is it a relationship you shouldn't have?
- A test score you didn't deserve?
- Is it a reimbursement check you shouldn't cash?
- Is it a degree you never earned?
- An award you didn't merit?
- A resume that didn't completely tell the truth?
- Is it something from the past you've never admitted?
- Is it something – like David – that steals your joy and your sleep and your sweet communion with God . . . because you know deep down, God knows too.

What happens next points to the ultimate solution – and it isn't found in religious absolution.

In fact, before David can interrupt him, Nathan goes on to deliver to David several consequences of his sin.

In fact, there are three of them.

1. Violence and death will become a part of David's household.

Notice verse 10 – Nathan says, Now therefore the sword will never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

As you study the final years of David's reign, the sword indeed never stops swinging. Murder among the royal family will become the scandal of Jerusalem and stain the legacy of David's reign.

2. Not only violence and murder, but illicit lust and immorality will become a part of David's household.

In the very next chapter, lust and rape will take place on the palace grounds among the royal family members – and David will be powerless to remedy it. It will end in even more murder.

But it'll involve immorality David never dreamed of by his adultery and murder; notice what Nathan adds in *verse 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 his sun. 12. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun."*

This is going to be fulfilled by Absalom, David's own son, as he overthrows David's throne. And as David runs for his life, Absalom takes David's harem, pitches a tent on top of the palace roof and openly sexually defiles all of them as a show of his royal power but also his utter disdain for his father, David.

If anybody thinks David gets a free pass, they need to think again.

Even though David will be forgiven, there is still the principle of reaping what you sow. I can remember my father often telling us four boys growing up that we couldn't sow a life of wild oats and then pray for a crop failure.

Some of it – by God's own design – will bear fruit we'd rather not harvest.

David's family is going to deliver to him a harvest begun by his own sin. In fact, what David did in one week – and then covered up over one year – most of his children are going to devote their lives to delighting in.

It probably took less than Nathan less than 3 minutes to deliver to David the stunning news that he had not only been caught red handed.

If David had slumped back into his throne in shame, by the time Nathan finished, David must have been nearly faint with grief and sorrow.

The next few words out of David's mouth will make all the difference win the world.

When King Saul was confronted by the prophet Samuel for sinning against God, Saul made up one lying excuse after another.

Will David do the same?

Notice verse 13, David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

No anger with God . . . no demand for leniency . . . no excuses of Bathsheba’s beauty or some middle age crisis.

I have sinned against the Lord. It’s only two words in the Hebrew language – but it says enough.

One Hebrew scholar wrote, “The words are very few, just as in the case of the publican in the Gospel of Luke who simply cried, “Be merciful to me a sinner” . . . and he went home justified. He goes on to write, there is no excuse here [from David]; no cloaking, no lessening of the gravity of his sin; there is no searching for a loophole; no pretext put forward, no human weakness pleaded; he simply acknowledged his guilt openly, candidly, and without any dishonesty.^x

It is the simplicity and honesty and transparency of David’s confession that makes it commendable rather than defective.^{xi}

Lets’ face it – we Christians would assume in our ignorance of grace – that God won’t even listen to David’s confession until there’s been at least 10 days of fasting, 2 months of community service, long nights of pleading, crying, begging and at least one trip up some stairway on his knees somewhere in Jerusalem.

Come on, David can’t expect forgiveness that fast.

We do not understand the atoning work of Christ – yet future for David – now past tense for us at the cross.

And because we don’t fully grasp the completed work of Christ on our behalf, we are honestly surprised by Nathan’s comment back to David in **verse 13 – The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.**”

I mean, isn’t that a bit quick?

The reason we think that way is because, as one theologian wrote on this text, “we [wrongly] assume that intensity of our repentance somehow contributes to the sufficiency of atonement.”^{xii}

Learn something fresh and deep and incredible in this encounter!

David is struck with prophetic exposure. He’s effectively caught red handed. He knows his hands are stained . . . he’s done everything to cover it up and the guilt has eaten away at him.

But now he’s confronted . . . laid bare . . . and after listening to both the exposure of his sin and the consequences that are going to play out on the royal

stage, he humbly and contritely and broken heartedly says, “I have sinned against God” and he meant it.

This is further proof that he is a man after God’s own heart.

How so?

This same theologian and author, Dr. Ralph Davis, went on to add, to be a man or woman after God’s heart is not to be sinless, but to be, among other things, utterly submissive to the accusing word of God.^{xiii}

That’s the same definition of true confession picked up by the Apostle John when he writes, **When we confess our sin – and the word for confess means, to agree with God – to say the same thing about our sin that God says – then God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)**

David was utterly, subdued, totally smitten by the word of God.^{xiv}

One author wrote that what we are watching here in the life of one of God’s children is nothing less than the vigilance of the grace of God.^{xv}

3. The harvest of David’s adultery and murder will play out in the lives of his children who rebel against God – murder, violence, lust and immorality will become the reputation of his immediate and extended family; but in addition to that, thirdly, the son born to David and Bathsheba will be taken by God in death.

Nathan informs David at the close of their meeting in **verse 14 that the child which had been born to you and Bathsheba will die.**

This is one of those passages that’s left without explanation. The reasoning behind the death of this little boy remains locked away in the secret mystery of God (**Deuteronomy 29:29**), who always does what is right (**Daniel 9:14**).

Two thoughts have come to mind in my study.

First, the taking of this boy immediately to be with the Lord was a mercy to him. He would have grown up to become the scapegoat of every slur and every hateful thought in this regard – the false guilt heaped upon him would have been unmerciful.

He would have been accused as the reason for Uriah’s murder; for all the intrigue that would flood the royal family to the very time of David’s death . . . this little boy would have been at the brunt of every cruel accusation.^{xvi}

I see in this the mercy of God.

But I also see in this the gospel of God.

Nathan connects the message that David can live with the fact that this innocent baby will die. There's little wiggle room around the language . . . David is assured that he will live; but a death will occur.

One Old Testament scholar writes, It is as if the child is David's substitute.^{xvii}

And here's the gospel . . . think of it . . . every one of us who are redeemed and forgiven will one day live forever because a son of David died.

The Son of David . . . died for us!

Our substitute . . . in the mystery of God's grace and mercy – a Son of David will be born and will die – so that we can be forgiven and live forever.

So don't hide your red hands . . . confess what stained them . . . the Son of David – Jesus Christ has already died to pay for it . . . He was stained entirely as he bore your guilt and mine.

Your prayer of confession doesn't have to be long; God isn't measuring the amount of tears or the length of your lamenting . . . he's waiting for a simple, honest, genuine admission of guilt. And it's His business to forgive . . . to take your crimson stained hands and heart and make them as white as snow . . . it is the mystery of His mercy to pardon . . . this is His vigilant . . . and amazing grace.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/1/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i USA Today, 05.22.14, p. 1

ii www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/caught-red-handed.html

iii Kenneth L. Chafin, 1, 2 Samuel (Word Books, 1989), p. 305

iv Charles R. Swindoll, David: A Man of Passion and Destiny (Word Publishing, 1997), p. 199

v Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, 2 Samuel: Out of Adversity (Christian Focus, 1999), p. 150

vi Adapted from Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3, general editor, Frank E. Gaebelein (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 942

vii W. Phillip Keller, David The Shepherd King: Book II (Word Books, 1986), p. 96

viii Swindoll, p. 201

ix Max Lucado, Facing Your Giants (Word Publishing, 2006), p. 131; citation: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2007/march/1030507.html

x C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume II (1875; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991), p. 391

xi Davis, p. 155

xii Adapted from Davis, p. 155

xiii Ibid

xiv Keller, p. 97

xv Davis, p. 149

xvi Adapted from Keller, p. 100

xvii Davis, p. 157