

July 26, 2009

Where Can We Find a Bailout from the Destiny of Sin?
2 Samuel 11:1-15

The scripture for today, 2 Samuel 11:1-15, is a story about king David's life. After the death of Saul, the first king of Israel, David became the King of Judea at the age of thirty. David was a royal man of God. He dedicated himself to God and God chose him as the king of Israel. He was just and right in the eyes of God.

After he became the king of Judea, David unified the two divided kingdoms, Israel of the north and Judea of the south. He became king over a unified Israel and relocated his kingdom to Jerusalem.

After becoming king of Judea, David conquered the Philistines and took the Ark of God, previously lost to the Philistines, from the Philistine to Jerusalem. He built the palace of David in Jerusalem. God blessed David's kingdom and promised to protect him and his descendants.

In prayer, David rededicated himself and Israel to God. David defeated his neighboring enemies, extended the boundaries of his kingdom, and strengthened Israel so that it became and honored by neighboring countries.

David was at the height of his success and triumph in his kingship when he became tempted by a woman, Bathsheba, the wife of his loyal soldier, Uriah, and committed adultery with her. As a king who has all power and authority, that incident might not have been considered a big deal in a human perspective, but in God's eyes it was not right. That act of adultery became the seed of evil that destroyed the Kingdom of David.

David's action was a definitely sin, a violation of the law of God. This is the issue I want to deal with today: "Where can we find a bailout from the destiny of sin?" Today's scripture reading, 2 Samuel 11:1-15, shows us how King David committed the sin of adultery, and how this sin affected his life deeply.

"Man does not live by bread alone, but by the word of God," as written in scripture, is the definition of a human being. Human beings need two kinds of food, physical food and spiritual food, to live. Love, faith and hope are the food for spiritual health in our lives. And sin is the disease of the spiritual body.

A noted medical school professor of Harvard Medical School, Dr. Richard Cabot, many years ago said, "There are four things by which we truly live: work and play and love and worship." The remedies of good health are work, play, love and worship. These are elements of physical and spiritual health which need to be balanced in our lives for a healthy life. The balance of body and spirit is important in our life. We have to keep our body healthy, on the one hand, and also keep our spirit healthy, on the other.

The story of David shows us when and how we could become entrenched in sin and how this sin could affect a life deeply.. Sin is spiritual sickness and it destroys one's spiritual life. Like physical disease, sin has the same distinctive natures of dilapidation to our nature.

First, sin is epidemic like swine flu. A couple of months ago, we were warned about a report of a "swine flu" epidemic. We have been told that swine flu is an epidemic disease that becomes more virulent by season and in specifically delineated geographic areas.

Similarly, our culture is the environment in which spiritual disease can grow. In a spiritual point of view, we are living in a culture of sickness which creates spiritual sickness or moral disease. I read a newspaper article which reported that venereal disease has become a disease common among teenagers.

In response to the sin prevalent in our society, we might be resigned to thinking, "It's O.K because everybody does it." However, the prevalence of sin in our culture, like spiritual air pollution, spreads spiritual sickness to the whole society. Without a good foundation for principles for moral values, a society cannot stand. Personal moral value is important to keep a healthy mind and spirit.

Second, sin is an infectious disease. I recently read an article which reported: "In a disturbing new projection, health officials say up to 40 percent of Americans could get swine flu this year and next, and several hundred thousand could die without a successful vaccine campaign and other measures." Because swine flu is an infectious disease, it is dangerous. Sin is also dangerous. It is also an infectious spiritual disease. When a parent is infected by immoral behavior, this behavior infects directly their children. When a child becomes infected by the flu, the child's friends become exposed to the flu as well. Spiritual diseases, similarly, destroys friendship and family and community.

Thirdly, certain sins may be transmitted from parents to children. There is an interesting story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 12 and 26 in the Old Testament. There was a famine in the land where Abraham lived. So, Abraham, with his wife Sarai, went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, "When the Egyptians ask, 'She is beautiful, is she your wife?' Then, I will say 'she is my sister,' so that they will treat me well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." That was the Abraham we call the father of faith.

When we read chapter 26 of Genesis, we find Isaac being in a similar situation. There was a famine in the land, again, besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time. Isaac went to the Philistines with his wife, Rebekah, for a while.. He met a man who asked him about his wife. Isaac said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say "She is my wife." He thought, "The man might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful." That is an example of the transmission of spiritual sin from one generation to another.

Theologically, we believe that the original sin that Adam and Eve committed was transmitted to us all. So, we have inherited this the tendency toward sin. We see many cases in which a man whose father was an alcoholic becomes himself an alcoholic also. Because the one's bad habitual behaviors, a parent may unknowingly transmit his own sickness to his children.

Today's scripture gives us notice of temptation, and tells us not to commit sin. But every temptation is an opportunity to do good. Temptation simply provides the choice. While temptation is Satan's primary weapon to destroy us, God wants to use it to develop us. Every time we choose to do good instead of sin, we are growing in the character of Christ.

We think temptation lies around us, but God says it begins within us. If we didn't have the internal desire, the temptation could not attract us. Temptation always starts in our mind, not in circumstances.

The best medicine is preventive medicine. In many places, the Bible shows us how to prevent from committing sin. Sin starts from a piece of greed and becomes bigger and bigger, taking root deeper and deeper within us, the fruits being the seeds of death.

However, the Bible provides a curative medicine for the sinner. There is always a way out. There is a remedy for the sinner. There are two kinds of law: punitive law and redemptive law. According to the punitive law, the Law of Moses, the fruit of our sin is death. But, there is also the Law of Grace, the law of redemption. The Law of Grace says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but shall have eternal life."

Have you heard the beautiful children's story about the three trees? The trees were talking in the forest one day about their dreams for the future. The first tree said it would like to be made into a cradle so that it might go on living as a support for the fragile life of a tiny new baby. The second tree wanted to be made into a big ship, so that it might go on living, carrying important cargo and influential people to exotic new lands. The third tree longed to stay right where it was, existing only as a tree, but growing ever taller, and pointing ever higher, to remind everyone that there is a God in heaven who loves them. Those were their dreams: One wanted to be a cradle, one wanted to be a mighty ship, and one wanted to be a tall tree, pointing people toward God.

But then, one day the woodcutters came and chopped down the three trees and destroyed their dreams. The first tree was not made into a cradle, but into a simple feeding trough, a manger for animals. But the manger was sold to a family in Bethlehem, and on the night Jesus was born, that simple feed box became the cradle for the Christ Child..

The second tree was built into a boat, but not the kind it had dreamed of – not a mighty ocean-going vessel- but a tiny inexpensive fishing boat. A man named Simon Peter bought the boat, and on one warm afternoon when the crowds pressed in, Jesus himself

climbed aboard that small fishing boat so that he might preach good news to the multitudes.

The third tree also was deprived of its dream. It wanted to remain standing tall and pointing toward God. Instead, it was cut down and shaped into a horrible instrument of torture, a cross. But it was on that very cross that Jesus was crucified, transforming a symbol of cruelty into a powerful reminder of God's eternal love for all people.

The three trees' dreams were crushed, and it seemed that it was finished when the dreams were crushed. But this was not the final word, but only a comma. God made their dreams differently but these three trees were exalted by God's plan nonetheless. That's the way it works. When we, in humility, give ourselves to God, our Lord can do greater things through us and for us – greater than we can ever imagine. That is the story of the cross of Jesus our Lord, the unfinished ending.

The transformation is redemption, the core of the Gospel. It is possible that your life can be transformed by the law of grace. Transformation is the completion of Christian salvation and redemption.

There available to any of us who believe in Him always the option to repent of our sin. Like a disease, sin has to be controlled when it is small. Otherwise, when its roots are deeper and deeper and its fruits become ripened, we pay for the results of sin no matter that we are forgiven by the law of Grace. The redemption of the life of a sinner takes time to be completed. We see the evidence of this in David's descendent who had to live with the repercussions of his sin and became recovered fully only in time.

In a little church in the Fiji Islands, there is an unusual baptismal font. The large stone, deeply stained, with a portion of the top hollowed out to hold water, was once called the Killing Rock, the place where cannibals brought their victims. It is now the place where they bring their babies to be baptized!

And the cross, once the emblem of suffering and shame and punishment and death, has been redeemed to symbolize love, and victory, and forgiveness, and life. So you see, events can be redeemed, and things can be redeemed.

The 2008 United Methodist General Conference was held on April 23-May 3rd in Fort Worth, Texas. I read a report that a special Communion Table was set there for General Conference, brought from the Mississippi river area. This communion table was made by a United Methodist Church member out of trees fallen on the ground by the ravage of Hurricane Katrina. The downed trees were fashioned into a communion table and other worship aids for the General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. The Gulf of Mexico was almost wiped off the map in 2005 by Hurricane Katrina. It was a national tragedy. But, the trees of tragedy became trees of privilege. These trees which had stood Gulf-side were transformed into the Lord's Table, and became an icon of the General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

Even when our life looks like a tree, fallen on the ground by the winds and storm of the world, our lives will be reused and transformed by the hand of God who molds us like a potter. This is the message for us sinners, and this the message of hope for our world of unrighteousness today, and for the time to come.