

Title: “Breaking Down Walls”

Chris Ryan

2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26-27

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Lesson: *Sin imprisons us but we find our freedom in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This Advent we make your way to the manger for that's where your savior lies. And give to him your gifts: your gifts of guilt and shame and sin. Pour out to him all that you have, all that keeps you from experiencing the freedom that he offers. And then receive from him true freedom, true freedom that he has won for you on the cross, a cross whose shadow falls over the manger and covers your sin.*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

It all started innocently enough with the prohibition of only one type of fruit, one tree in the garden. It led to a cover up, quite literally. It quickly grew bigger with an unfavored offering, and the subsequent murder of Able. There was then, of course, another coverup: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The “it” I’m talking about is, of course sin and our response to it. And our response to it seems to always be the same: cover it up. Bury it in lies or hide it in justifications. We are experts at this and we have been since the dawn of time.

⁹What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun.

In our passage tonight we read of one couple that Jesus came through. Like everyone in the list from Matthew’s Gospel, David and Bathsheba are sinners, and royal ones at that! They sinned, tried to bury it, cover it up, and even justify it.

What a site Bathsheba must have been for King David that afternoon.... Sure, it was “the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle” but instead of doing *that* he sent “Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel.” And while “they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah... David remained at Jerusalem.” Seems like a better choice to remain in the comfort of his castle and take in the sights than to go out and fight alongside his kingdom.

And so, he stayed, and sinned, and then tried to cover it up. “I am pregnant,” Bathsheba tells him. What does he do? He tries to fix it himself and succeeds in just making it worse. So now, instead of simply a potential optics problem by not joining in the warfare, he has a mistress he’s impregnated and a loyal soldier he has effectively had murdered.

and there is nothing new under the sun.

This is the problem with sin. It has corrupted all of creation and it continues to corrupt all of creation. And because we are part of God's creation we are corrupt and we continue to sin. And we continue to cover it up, to hide it from each other and from God. But sin doesn't go away so easily. Instead, it has a tendency to shackle itself to us, to bind us to it so that we see no other choice than to combat it with yet another sin, and then another, thinking that we might find that one final sin that holds the key to our freedom. That at last, we will be free from that initial sin and move on with our life.

But sin will never give up its key; sin will never release us from its grasp. And left on our own, we are powerless to fight it. We are powerless to free ourselves from it. We fight with the only weapons that we have: violent sin; deceiving sin; creative sin. But in the end all we win are tighter shackles and prison walls that continue to close in. And even then we *still* believe that we are in control and can eventually win the battle.

That's the problem with sin. It is the tool of Satan. He uses it to interfere with the freedom that God has given his creation. He can't stand that anyone would love God and so he calls to us, just like he called to Adam, just like he called to David, and he says: "I have built a place for you to rule. I have built a place where you can be your own god. I have found for you a better object for your faith, for your trust. I present to you.... yourself." And the very second that we even consider the offer, our eyes dart away from God for the briefest of moments, he cuffs us and leads us away. And that's usually when we first realize what just happened and we attempt to fight back.

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.

David was shackled. He was imprisoned, he was locked up so tightly that the walls closed in on him, cutting off his breath. He fought but that only tightened those cuffs and constrained those walls. And Satan looked on. Would he hit the bottom? Would he abandon all hope?

Lest we forget about Bathsheba, she was in her own prison:

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.

Left to themselves, neither would escape.

<pause>

What about you? What prison are you tied up in? It may not be so drastic a situation as David or Bathsheba but it's still sin. And whether it's a lie or worse, it is a prison that you find yourself in. Shackled with no door, no.... escape. And Satan as the guard.

<pause>

Tonight we heard the first part of the message, the sin part, but what we didn't read was the other side, the freedom passage. You might think that I'm talking about Nathan and his rebuke to David and David's repentance, but I'm not. Because in isolation, if it were *only* Nathan and David, that repentance would have done nothing to free him from his chains. I'm talking about the other side, the Jesus side. I'm talking about our freedom that only he can provide.

We read the first chapter of Matthew last week and we learned that Jesus came *through* sinners *for* sinners. Tonight, we might say that Jesus came *through* prisoners to *free* prisoners. He came *through* prison walls to *destroy* prison walls. You see, Jesus didn't come *with* a key that unlocks our chains. He came on a *cross* and completely *destroyed* those chains. He destroyed those walls. There was no stone left on top of another. Scratch that; there was no stone *left!* It was all gone. It *is* all gone. The prison walls... gone. The shackles.... gone. The guard... imprisoned.

This is why he came. This is why we are here tonight. We look back and remember the freedom that Christ won for us and we look forward and see the ultimate freedom that we will have in Christ when he returns once again.

<pause>

But tonight. Tonight, look around. What do you see? Look at your arms. Are they bound? Look in front of you. Is there a prison wall? Are you constrained? Do you feel the weight of those chains, that guilt, still? If so, I'm here to tell you that tonight's message is for you. What you are seeing, what you are experiencing is an illusion by Satan. Even now, even defeated, he wants to take you down with him. He won't stop trying, but he has no power over you. He has no authority over you. Tonight, I'm here to tell you that through your baptism you have been adopted into the family of God. I'm here to tell you that through your baptism and through the Lord's Supper you have received the forgiveness of *all* of your sins. You are free. Jesus your savior has set you free and the powers of hell can never change that. And so, this Advent, make your way to the manger for that's where your savior lies. And give to him your gifts: your gifts of guilt and shame and sin. Hand him your shackles and prison walls. Pour out to him all that you have, all that keeps you from experiencing the freedom that he offers. And then receive from him true freedom, true freedom that he won for you on the cross, a cross whose shadow falls over the manger and completely covers your sin.

You are free, indeed.

Please pray with me.

(#696)

O God my faithful God, true fountain ever flowing
Without whom nothing is, all perfect gifts bestowing
Give me a healthy frame, and may I have within
A conscience free from blame, a soul unstained by sin.