

## **“The Fall of a King” – 2 Samuel 11:1-15 – August 9, 2015**

**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

Most of us here are familiar with the Ten Commandments. We may not be able to recite all ten of them word for word, but we have a good working knowledge of what they say. These were the commandments that God gave to Moses to instruct the Hebrew people after their escape from slavery in Egypt. The commandments are not overly restrictive or cumbersome. They are in fact an excellent guide to keep order and peace in society, no matter the time period. And by following them, we find ourselves living lives of wholeness according to God’s design for us as humans.

Commandment Ten states “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Commandment Seven states, “You shall not commit adultery.” Commandment Six states, “You shall not murder.” No coveting, no adultery, no murder. If you were paying attention to the story I just read, you would have noticed that in one simple act of selfish lust, King David broke two and was about to break the third.

Now remember, King David was chosen to succeed King Saul, because “David was a man after God’s own heart.” He loved God, he worshipped God, he trusted God. This is the same David, who as a shepherd boy was able to slay the giant Goliath, because he, David, followed the path of God. The same David, who conquered the city of Jerusalem and brought the ark of God into the city – the ark that contained within it the Law of Moses. How did David manage to go so far astray?

Like the story of the slaying of Goliath, the story of David and Bathsheba is a very familiar story. It was springtime – the time of year that kings liked to wage war. For twenty years, David sat on the throne and he was an impressive warrior and leader. He led his soldiers into battle over and over again. His reign, occurring during the Iron Age, was violent and bloody. But then one year, David decided to stay home, leaving his troops in the capable hands of his general Joab. Was he tired, worn out from decades of blood and war? Was he feeling his age? Was he bored from the monotony?

One afternoon during his sabbatical from war, David took a stroll out on the roof of his palace that overlooked the city of Jerusalem. As he gazed over his city, his eyes stopped when he spotted a beautiful woman bathing in the courtyard of her home. Now David did not lack for female companionship; had numerous wives and concubines. He could have averted his gaze, ending his intrusion on the woman’s private moment, but his gaze lingered on her flesh and stirred his desire. He had to know who she was, so he summoned a servant to discover her identity.

Now, once David learned that Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, he should have stopped. This woman was out of bounds as she was the wife of one of his soldiers. Yet desire provoked his covetous feelings. He couldn’t leave it alone. In that moment David lost all sense of good judgment, and lusted after another man’s wife. One commandment broken.

According to the Mercer Dictionary of the Bible, “to covet sometimes means not only to have an inordinate desire for something but to take steps to get the desired thing...but it can also simply refer

to the hankering for the life or the goods of someone else." A parallel verb is "to desire" as in to be eaten up with the craving for what one does not have.

In our affluent culture, where for most of us, our basic needs are already met, the commandment to "not covet" refers to our "insatiable longing for more and more." It doesn't take much to look around us at billboards, magazine ads, TV commercials, internet pop-ups – all telling us about the things we simply must have. The things we surely cannot live without. But here's a problem with being in constant pursuit of acquiring more things, instead of being content with what we have. When we're focused on satisfying our **wants**, we are less likely to acknowledge the basic **needs** of those around us - those who do without so that we can have more. And we get those things, or grow accustomed to a certain lifestyle, it's difficult to give it up.

Think about the current debate over the federal minimum wage. It's been shown that a family cannot survive on minimum wage alone. One of the arguments against raising it is that the increased cost to employ people will be passed on to consumers. But so what? Is it really so bad to have to pay a little more for something so that others can support their families?

Without stopping to consider his actions or their consequences, David acted on his lust and sent for Bathsheba. He took her to his bed, and then sent her on her way. A second commandment broken. And along with that, I think we can add the offense of assault and rape. Taken from the privacy of her own home, she finds herself dragged into the king's bed and violated. Could she have said no? To the king? Hardly. She had no choice in the matter. She had no rights. To him she was simply an object used to satisfy his own gratification. Jewish Law was more concerned with the offense against the husband, Uriah. By taking another man's wife, another man's property, David committed adultery. And the punishment was death by stoning.

Not long after the assault, Bathsheba discovered she was pregnant. She had this devastating news delivered to David. No doubt she was feeling an intense level of anxiety at this discovery. David tried to cover his sin by summoning Uriah home from the battle front. By giving the soldier leave, David believed Uriah would come home, have sexual relations with his wife, and assume he had impregnated her.

But the plot thickens. Uriah refused to come to his house, sleeping instead in the servants' quarters. While his fellow soldiers were still at war, Uriah believed it would be wrong for him to take pleasure in the comforts of home. He believed to do so would be dishonorable to his comrades. What an ironic slap in David's face! Unlike his king, Uriah did not succumb to temptation.

For David, this should have been a wakeup call. He should have fessed up. But now all David could see was that he had been backed into a corner. His sins were catching up to him, and instead of coming clean, he chose to continue the downward spiral into more sin. And this, my friends, is the trap. Sin begets more sin. We tend to deceive ourselves into avoiding naming sin for what it is, instead, choosing to justify it or attempting to cover it up. Avoiding sin is impossible. As humans we'll never stop sinning. Recognizing sin for what it is, naming it, owning up to it, that is the first step toward confession and repentance. But David wasn't at that point.

Instead, clever David developed another plan. He tried to get Uriah drunk enough to compromise his values. But again he failed. David became desperate and his next idea offered a final solution. The King wrote a message and sealed it, ordering the general to place Uriah on the front lines and leave him to be slaughtered. Unsuspecting Uriah was given the task of carrying his very own death sentence. And that's where this week's story ends.

Back in the late 90's and early 2000's I was a huge fan of the show Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Buffy was a teenaged girl who had superpowers – strength, speed, dexterity – and her job was to hunt vampires and other dark creatures that threatened humanity. Buffy was also a normal high school student, who, while prone to getting into trouble when her slaying got in the way of her school time, was a good and decent person who just had a special calling to save the world once a week.

In one episode, another vampire slayer named Faith began hanging out with Buffy. Faith didn't try to live a normal life or fit in. She relished her power and saw herself as being better than regular people. And she didn't like to follow the rules. Buffy enjoyed her time with Faith, but was hesitant to break the law. Late one night, after a battle against the evil monsters, Faith was pumped up on adrenalin and wanted new weapons, so she broke into a sporting goods store, dragging Buffy with her. Buffy tried to get Faith to leave, but Faith turned to her, saying, "Look. We save people every day. We can do what we want. We're above the law. We want something, we take it." And she walked over to a display of crossbows. She said, pointedly, "Life as a slayer is very simple. Want. Take. Have." And pulled down a large crossbow. Buffy thought about it for a moment, then turned to glass display of hunting knives. She looked at the gleaming weapons and broke through the glass. "Want. Take. Have." (the slayers' relationship loosely summarized from: episode "Bad Girls," by Doug Petrie, air date 2/9/99, and episode "Consequences," by Marti Noxon, air date 2/16/99)

Even these words that Faith and Buffy used are examples of the simplicity yet power of desire. It begins with a craving to be in total control and then escalates into the belief that we are somehow exempt from following the expected guideline or rule. It doesn't apply to us. Or we're somehow special and exist above the law. Or this is a unique situation where the law doesn't apply. Or we believe it's not affecting anyone else, so why does it matter? There is no thought of consequences.

We might wonder why the commandment to "not covet" exists at all. It's an internal thought. It's not an outward action that affects anyone, so who is it really hurting if you have an overwhelming desire to possess something belonging to someone else. If you don't actually take it, what's the big deal? Well, the big deal is, emotion is strong. Put an object out of our reach, and that makes it all the more desirable. Our attitudes and our drives have an effect on our behavior. Studies have shown that kids who go to school hungry do poorly on tests and have a difficult time paying attention in class. The underlying need to satiate their hunger impacts their higher functioning.

So when we covet something and continue to dwell on the having, we feed that desire within us, and what maybe started out as a simple want becomes something more, and it impacts the other parts of our lives. I guess we could call it the "gateway sin." Allowing ourselves to covet leaves the door open for stronger and more dangerous sins to follow.

It's quite a predicament that we humans are in. Sin is messy. And when we get in too deep, instead of admitting our wrongdoing, we tend to try to cover it up, hide it or rationalize it away. And even when the sin is exposed, how do we fix all the brokenness that our mistakes caused? The people we hurt, the negative consequences? Trouble is, we can't. We can't do it on our own.