

## **From Ugly Stains to Beautiful Painting**

### **2 Samuel 12:24-25**

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 6-2-2013

#### **Introduction**

Back in 2011 I told you of how Sir Edwin Landseer, the famous painter of wildlife, created his first wall painting. He was eating at a little inn in Scotland when a fisherman's gesticulations accidentally knocked a tea cup out of the waitresses hands, splashing the tea against the newly whitewashed wall and creating a dark stain. The man was enormously embarrassed and apologized profusely to the hostess of the inn. Landseer, who was at the next table witnessing this kafluff, asked if he could make something of the stain, and after gaining permission, he made a magnificent drawing of a royal stag, working with some ink – India Ink, I believe. And so the stain became the centerpiece of something rather beautiful. Well, when I was hunting for that illustration on Wednesday, I found out that this was not Landseer's only wall painting. In fact, he started a fad that other artists have imitated since then. J. Stuart Holden tells about Landseer's painting in a mansion near to his summer cottage, up in the Highlands of Scotland. One of the rooms of that mansion has the walls absolutely filled with sketches made by various distinguished artists who have spent the night there, and have taken advantage of one feature or another of those walls. Landseer was the first one to add a sketch to that wall, this time using charcoal instead of ink, and having a light brown soda stain form the outline of a beautiful waterfall, bordered by trees and Scottish wildlife. So he has turned at least two ugly stains into gorgeous paintings.

And I want you to keep those two images in your mind as we go through this sermon. The first image has for a long time been a very powerful motivator in keeping me from letting my past get me down or discouraged. I think most of us have something in our lives that could easily make us cringe. We are rather glad that new people don't know anything about that event in our lives. But David didn't take that perspective. You will remember from Psalms 38 and 51 that he actually talked about how he blew it – and he talked about it with everyone. He had the chief musician sing about his sins, and of course about the glories of God's grace that covered those sins. And it was the glories of God's grace that enabled him to talk about his sin without cringing in absolute shame. Rather than feeling

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sick every time he saw the stain on the wall of his life, David used it as an opportunity to glory in and to magnify God's grace. And some of you need to learn to do that so that you are not chained down by the shame of your past.

What Jesus did for David was on display for anyone who visited the proverbial mansion of his life. As he said in Psalm 51,

**Psalms 51:12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.**

**Psalms 51:13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.**

It was realizing what God had done through his stain that made him such a good counselor to other sinners. He went on to say,

**Psalms 51:14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.**

**Psalms 51:15 O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.**

**Psalms 51:16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.**

In other words, God is not glorified when you beat up on yourself continually, and when you cringe and are paralyzed by your past, or when you feel like you have to confess your past sin hundreds of times. That's like slaying the same sacrifice over and over. God doesn't want you to do that. He wants you to get on with life.

So this passage in 2 Samuel 12 is about David getting back up on his feet, moving on, and making something beautiful and God-glorifying out of his stain. It's sort of like a friend of mine who had an abortion earlier in her life, and she has turned that sin into a painting of God's grace that is so beautiful that she has been able to give hope and healing to many other women, just as David has given hope and healing to countless millions through the Psalms he wrote during this period. And each phrase of our passage emphasizes aspects of those Psalms that show how God brought beauty out of ashes, and a beautiful painting out of an ugly stain.

## **I. From selfish to caring (v. 24a with vv. 15-19)**

Verse 24 records the first stroke that God, the master painter, painted onto the ugliness of David's sin. Verse 24 says, "**Then David comforted Bathsheba...**" Prior to chapter 12 David had used Bathsheba and sent her back to her house after he had satisfied his lust. It was lust, not love, and it showed absolutely no care for her as a person. He used her and dumped her. In my estimation, chapter 11 shows the ultimate in ugly selfishness. It is as

dark a stain on David's life as you could get. And for men who have had ugly sexual lifestyles prior to being Christians, this is an encouraging chapter. You can change, and God can cover the ugliness of the past and make you a trophy of His grace. The first part of chapter 12 shows the beginnings of caring more about someone else's life than he did for his own. He wept and wept over what he had done to this poor child. We saw that the child probably had the same venereal disease that he did, though we don't know that for sure. He prayed to God to heal him. Based on the Psalms that David wrote, those first verses show that God had begun to do a work of grace in his life. He was moving David from selfishness back into self-sacrificing care. And verse 24 shows David bringing the same care and comfort to Bathsheba. And by this time he was well equipped to bring that comfort to her. Let me explain:

We have already seen the hell that David went through in the previous week. He had suffered horrible guilt, alienation from God, alienation and disgust from family members over his smelly venereal disease, and possibly other diseases, and Psalm 38 seems to indicate that his family hated him for what he had done. And you can hardly blame them. David was in the pit of misery. But during this week, God had helped David to process through this agony via five inspired Psalms - Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, and 103. When you read those Psalms you realize that the God of all comfort had comforted David's soul and brought healing to both his soul and his body. God didn't heal the baby, but he seems to have healed David. And though I won't give any exposition of Psalm 103 during this series, you can see the gratefulness of David written all over that Psalm. Let me read some of it. He says,

**Psalms 103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!**

**Psalms 103:2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:**

**Psalms 103:3 Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases,**

**Psalms 103:4 Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,**

**Psalms 103:5 Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*, so *that* your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

**Psalms 103:8 The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.**

**Psalms 103:9 He will not always strive *with us*, nor will He keep *His anger* forever.**

**Psalms 103:10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.**

**Psalms 103:11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;**

**Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.**

**Psalms 103:13 As a father pities *his* children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him.**

**Psalms 103:14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust.**

Commentators say that this Psalm was written somewhere in the timeframe of the latter part of chapter 12. I imagine God bringing this Psalm to him on the day that he washed himself, put on new clothing, and when he went into the temple to worship in verse 20. And I can imagine that all five Psalms formed a theological and pastoral basis for him to be able to wash his wife with the water of the word and to bring true comfort to her. In any case, David was uniquely enabled to bring comfort precisely because he had learned how to be comforted by God's grace. As Paul words it in 2 Corinthians 1:4,

**who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God**

Apart from the dark stain of chapter 11, David would never have known the depth of God's mercies or seen the beauty of God's painting in his life. And while in past sermons I have you given every reason in the book to avoid the things that led to David's sin, those five Psalms prepared David to bring a depth of comfort into Bathsheba's life that probably nobody else could. In any case, out of the ashes of his selfishness, God raised up an attitude of ministry and care that, as Psalm 51 words it, would enable him to teach transgressors God's ways.

## **II. An unlawful marriage redeemed (see "Uriah's wife" in v. 15 and "his wife" in v. 24)**

The second thing that we see in these verses is that God redeemed an unlawful marriage and enabled David to bring something good out of an absolute mess. And this is something we need to understand if we are to effectively reach out to our messed up culture. Actually, any culture for that matter. My parents were missionaries in Ethiopia for thirty years, and the first churches they started were full of messed up people. In fact, they were people who might make some of our family integrated churches a little bit nervous. Hopefully our church would not be nervous. There were men who had three or four wives. What do you do with that?! Obviously 1 Timothy 3

says that they weren't qualified to be elders, but my parents integrated them into the church and started teaching them what it meant to raise up a generation of children that weren't messed up and who would not repeat their sins. My parents simply couldn't ignore the messy issues that this chapter addresses, and with the downhill slide that *our* country is heading into, the church in America will no longer be able to ignore them.

But here's the point: God's grace can make something good even out of the stains of unlawful marriages. Churches that reject people with unlawful marriages will not be effective in reaching and transforming our future. Now, I in no way want to communicate that having a stain is no big deal – that we will just confess and take it to the Lord. No. No. In previous sermons we have seen the incredible problems and complications that come from violating God's blueprints for marriage, and I have given you many reasons why it is imperative to avoid David's marital problems. They created major problems, not just while he was alive, but in succeeding generations. But can God paint something beautiful when a sinful marriage has already happened? Yes, He can. I want you to see the significance of the next two words, "**his wife.**"

And to understand those words, we need to back up a bit. We need to ask the question, "Was David's marriage to Bathsheba a horrible sin?" Yes, we saw in a previous sermon all the reasons why it was. He should have owned up to his sin and supported her and any baby that might result, but not marry her. In fact, God was so offended by the marriage, that even though David had married Bathsheba in chapter 11, and even though she had legally been his wife for almost eight months, God still calls her *Uriah's* wife in verse 15 of this chapter. It says, "**And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill.**" Calling David's wife Uriah's wife is not by accident. In God's eyes, she should not have been David's wife. It was a sinful marriage. There was nothing about that marriage that was good. It was a marriage based on adultery, polygamy, and a cover-up of sin. As far as God was concerned, she was still Uriah's lawful wife, though he was dead. Even apart from the earlier adultery that she had committed, Jesus would have described the marriage itself as adultery. But with David's repentance a whole new chapter opened up on their marriage. God Himself declares her to be David's wife in verse 24. Though David's polygamy was clearly called a sin in Deuteronomy 17 and other passages, God was able to redeem and regulate such marriages, even though they had been entered into unlawfully.

And those two words, “his wife,” bring hope and comfort to people who have started off with unlawful marriages. There are many divorces in America that should never have happened, and remarriages that should never have happened. What do we do with them? We help them to enter into God’s painting studio and to make something beautiful out of what should never have been there in the first place. Though we don’t have much polygamy in America, there is a sense in which serial polygamy is everywhere. There are marriages of believers to unbelievers, which the Bible says should never have happened. Sinfully entered, but still permanent.

So while the laws of harvest that we looked at before will still bring negative consequences even after there is forgiveness (and verse 14 makes that clear), God’s law seeks to minimize those negative consequences and God’s grace enables such marriages to still be vehicles of his healing work. Unfortunately, some Christians have been legalistic (or what Ecclesiastes calls overly righteous - or going beyond God's law) and they have said that they want the stain permanent – that no one may paint anything on it by God’s grace.

For example, Bill Gothard, much as I appreciate him on many issues, has created havoc with divorced and remarried couples. Though already married to a second spouse, Gothard has insisted that they divorce their second spouse and get remarried to the first. This is such a flagrant violation of God’s law, that I find it hard to understand why he would do that. Yes the second marriage was sinfully entered into, but listen to what Deuteronomy 24, verses 1-4 says:

**Deuteronomy 24:1** “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house,  
**Deuteronomy 24:2** when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s *wife*,  
**Deuteronomy 24:3** *if* the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife,  
**Deuteronomy 24:4** *then* her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance.

Beyond contradicting Gothard’s legalism, that passage indicates that God’s law makes provision for the messiness of life and regulates the messiness of life, though it says that there are limits to even that provision.

The law would say that when married to your stepmother, you must get a divorce and leave the relationship immediately, even before the divorce. And Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 5. Same for any other form of incest or for homosexual marriage. There are limits, but God's law gives guidance to help us sort through some of the messy family issues that we are beginning to see in our culture. Deuteronomy 24 indicates that though David had defiled Bathsheba, and though he should never have married her in the first place, pregnant or not (and we looked at that), once he sinfully married her, he now had responsibilities toward her that he could not throw off. And God calls her "his wife." That's God's opinion. It is now a marriage, contrary to what some people claim.

But David's marriage to yet another wife illustrates a similar messy problem that Christians have had to deal with in Africa - polygamy. In Africa, a number of missions agencies have gone way beyond the word of God and have made converted polygamists divorce all wives except for their first one. But this puts the poor women who were divorced into incredible difficult circumstances, often having to resort to prostitution to survive. The New Testament doesn't do that. Paul simply said that polygamists couldn't be elders, which implies that they were still members of the church, and though horribly stained, God could make a painting out of their stain.

### **III. Adultery restored to legitimacy (v. 24b)**

But the next two phrases illustrate a better way to deal with yet another sticky issue related to polygamy. One mission agency in Africa was a little bit better than the previous ones that I mentioned. They cared about the women and mandated that the polygamous man must build a separate house for each wife, support his second and third wives, but the agency would not let that man have sexual relations with the later wives. But that too left the poor wives again very disadvantaged, and often the arranged marriage to the 20 year old was to a woman who was 20-40 years older and was a political marriage that favored the parents. Many times the young man was forced into that first marriage. It was a mess, and the rule disadvantaged the man. But think about the women in this situation. Though they were financially cared for, and though there was some room left for painting beauty into their lives in other ways, God's law about providing for the emotional and sexual needs of the second and third wives was ignored. This too was a form of legalism.

And the next phrase in verse 24 addresses that point as well – God's grace changed the adultery into legitimate relations between husband and

wife. From Psalm 38 it appeared that David was in the doghouse with all of his other wives and children at this point, and these two were able to care for and minister to each other while David sought to repair the other relations that he had destroyed. And I believe he worked hard at repairing those relationships. But he also took responsibility for this one. Verse 24 says,

**Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her**

Was David's marriage to Bathsheba a sin? Yes. Deuteronomy 17 makes it clear that kings were not to multiply wives to themselves. But once the marriage had happened, what was David's responsibility? The law made it clear that he must nurture her, provide food and clothing for her, and minister to her sexually. Exodus 21:10 says,

**If he takes another wife, he shall not withhold her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. (NAB)**

If a polygamous husband took Exodus 21:10 seriously, he would be one worn out man. David would be responsible to satisfy the emotional and sexual needs of all of his wives. Anyone who has studied polygamy knows that this would be next to impossible to do – yet another reason to avoid the sin of polygamy.

But my main point is that life is messy, yet like the two stains on the wall that Sir Edwin Landseer turned into beauty, we can look to God to bring some degree of beauty into the messed up marriages that we progressively come into contact with in America. There is no reason to let yet another marriage turn sour. We should let them make something out of that stain, and turn it into a painting. The Bible gives consequences for sin, but it also gives some beauty for ashes.

#### **IV. God's love for the son of this badly entered marriage (v. 24c)**

The fourth area of David's life that was painted by the brush of God's grace was in giving and loving a new son from this relationship. Verse 24 says, "**So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the LORD loved him.**" God did not curse all of her offspring with death. He opened her womb with a special son whom He loved. Earlier he had comforted David's heart with the knowledge that the first son who had died would be in paradise, and God now comforts their hearts with the message that He loves this new son. The text says, "**Now the LORD loved him, and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.**"



This would have been such a comfort to both the parents and to Solomon as he grew up. When you are the child of a less-than-ideal union, it is easy for you to feel unloved. This was the problem with Jephthah in the book of Judges, and it developed an orphan spirit within him. Solomon may have received persecution from his other brothers. Psalm 38 makes clear that the rest of the family was absolutely disgusted with David and Bathsheba, and this may have translated into stiff-arming Solomon himself as he grew up. Certainly *David* cried out in anguish, “**My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off.**” Given the strong attitudes that David’s family had against David and Bathsheba in Psalm 38, it would have been so easy for any of the three to allow those attitudes to make them feel like a stain and a blot on the family. It would have been so easy to have that negativity filter into Bathsheba’s sense of self-worth and into Solomon’s sense of self-worth. But they knew that God loved them. In fact, verse 25 has God going to the extra effort of sending Nathan the prophet to let them know that God loved that child, and that the child was a special child. And David’s ministry kept Bathsheba and Solomon from developing the orphan spirit that Jephthah had.

And what a comfort this is to the offspring of criminals, the offspring of fornication, and incest, survivors of botched abortions, or other parental relations that simply were not good. I have known adults who have taken on their parents’ sins as if it was their identity and as if it made them second-class citizens. They are Jephthahs. But it doesn’t matter how ugly or stained your parent’s background might be, God’s love can bring beauty, security, and meaning into your life. You may feel unloved by someone whose approval you desperately long for, but *God’s* opinion and *God’s* love is what should really drive your life. And Ed Welch’s book, *When People Are Big And God Is Small*, can help you to sort through that.

## V. Turmoil replaced with peace (v. 24d)

The fifth gift from the stroke of God’s paint brush was that the turmoil that resulted was finally replaced by peace, and David named this son appropriately, Solomon, which is pronounced in Hebrew, Shelomo, or “his peace.” There is debate on whether the “his” refers to God or David. Is it David’s peace that is celebrated or God’s peace? I’m not sure. But either way, the name speaks of the depth to which God’s paintbrush of grace was at work. The dictionary amplifies on the meaning of this shalom or peace by saying that it means, “completion and fulfillment—of entering into a state of wholeness and unity, a restored relationship.” (TWOT) And isn’t wholeness and a restored relationship the desire that David expressed in the Psalms? He

wanted shalom with God, and God gave it. He wanted shalom with the rest of his wives and children, and the Psalms indicate to me that David was certainly going to work at gaining it.

Shelomo refers to the reversal of all that was lost in the fall, and can include wholeness of body, soul, relationships, and fulfillment. It's a beautiful testimony to the fact that God can bring beauty from ashes, and a painting out of an ugly stain. And since Solomon stands as a symbol of Christ in the book of 1 Kings, it may have messianic symbolism in this verse as well. Many commentators believe that it does. And if so, then this points to Jesus. It would ultimately be through Jesus that the ugliness of David's marriage stain would find some beauty. It was through the final Solomon, Jesus, that David would receive forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration that we looked at last week. It would be through the shalom of Jesus that judgment would be replaced with God's favor.

## **VI. Covenant succession can happen even in messed up families (v. 25)**

But the final stroke of God's brush is the name Jedediah. Commentators point out that Jedediah has the same Hebrew root as David. David means "beloved" and Jedediah means "beloved of Yahweh. They may not look like they are related in the English, but both names have the same Hebrew root. As one commentator said, "Its connection to his father's name hints at the fact that Solomon/Jedidiah would become the successor to his father David."<sup>1</sup>

If this is true, then that name also hints at the covenant succession that God had promised in the Davidic covenant. Covenant succession can happen even in messed up families. Obviously the sins are visited to the third and fourth generation as well, and Solomon embraced his father's sin of polygamy. But good characteristics were passed on and certainly the faith was passed on.

## **Conclusion**

So even though this is a tiny little passage, it points to the fact that God loves to bring beauty out of ugliness. He loves to turn what Satan used to destroy, into something that would actually strengthen David and

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen J. Andrews and Robert D. Bergen, *I & II Samuel*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 6 of Holman Old Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2009), 278.

Bathsheba in their commitment to Him, and would strengthen their ability to minister to others.

In conclusion I would like to remind you of three lessons that I gave back in 2010 in the first sermon on this series on the life of David. It was the sermon where Matthew gives a genealogy and makes some theological lessons that we can learn from the ancestors and descendants of David. And each of those applications in Matthew's genealogy are tightly related to this passage.

First, Matthew by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit made it unmistakably clear through the names that he emphasized in David's ancestors, that

Christ does not just associate with those whose lives are put together. Instead we find that He was a friend of publicans and sinners. He welcomed into His inner circle a former prostitute. He was not ashamed to associate with the worst of men and women. After all, it was for the purpose of saving men, women and children from such sins that Christ was born and died. So the genealogy leading up to David was preparing him to depend upon the Messiah alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. David knew that if God withdrew his grace for even a moment, he would be in trouble. And he learned to hunger for God and to depend upon God. The stories that were passed down did not teach him to be self-righteous, but to receive the righteousness of the coming Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

So the first names in that genealogy taught us (like this passage does) that God can turn unbelievably ugly stains into paintings that we treasure. Treasures of grace. And if God welcomed the David's and Bathsheba's of this world into his family, we should welcome them as well. We should be ready to see them as paintings and not stains. In fact, I've invited a friend of Joel's, and all of their friends, some of whom were former Hell's Angels, and who have tattles and leather to visit our church. They are part of the Bikers For Christ group. And I hope we can give them a warm welcome.

A second lesson that we learned from the genealogy from David to the exile was how much trouble David's polygamy led to. It led to a lot of problems, but it certainly led to polygamy in the lives of his descendants. We saw how critical it is to be a one-woman man and a one-man woman. We saw how critical it is to take seriously courtship and prayerfully seek to find a godly spouse and preparing yourself to be a godly spouse. We saw that the seeds of disaster were sown when David was driven more by romantic attractions than by Biblical blueprints. Over half of David's descendants

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<sup>2</sup> From the first sermon in this series.

from Babylon to the exile were kings who turned out very badly for much the same root issues that got David into trouble in chapter 11. But we saw that God's grace still kept the faith alive, though at times it was very, very faint. Our actions do have consequences, so don't take this sermon on stains being turned into beautiful paintings as an excuse to sin. David's genealogy shows what a disastrous idea that is.

The last lesson that I want to remind you of from 2010 is that we should strive with all of our might to lay up a spiritual heritage for our children's children and make sure that covenant succession is as successful as it can be. The men in David's line after the exile had finally learned the valuable lesson of covenant succession. Covenant succession is faithfully passing the faith from one generation to the next, and to the next, and to the next, without any stop. It's not enough to be a good guy like David if you lose your family. The men in the last section of Matthew's genealogy learned from their ancestors that you cannot take your children for granted. They learned about the mess you can have with multiple wives, and they avoided that. They learned about how important it is to take care of your own household before you try to fix culture. They learned how important it is to catch the hearts of your children before they grow up. They learned of the power of God's grace to make generation after generation of godly descendants. David wanted that, but he messed up not just through his marriages, but also by failing to discipline and train his children in the fear and nurture of the Lord. So we must strive with all our might to lay up a spiritual heritage for our children, not just to have lots of children.

The bottom line from this passage is that God can make an ugly stain into a beautiful painting of grace, but it is far better to avoid the stains in the first place. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.



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By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 6-2-2013

### Introduction

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II. An unlawful marriage redeemed (see “Uriah’s wife” in v. 15 and “his wife” in v. 24)

**SELFISHNESS,**  
a fantastic way to be miserable!

III. Adultery restored to legitimacy (v. 24b)

IV. God’s love for the son of this badly entered marriage (v. 24c)



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