

“An Overlooked Part of the Story Worth Remembering”

(A Dramatic Sermon)

2 Samuel 11:1–15

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Sometimes I wonder if my life matters at all. Will anyone remember anything important about me? I am mentioned by name in scripture, but my story gets lost in the shadow of other stories. I’m just a bit player in one brief episode. Do you ever feel this way about your life? Do you know others who feel this way?

I am just a loyal citizen, a dutiful soldier who serves my king, a man who tries to do what is right, no matter what the consequences. As one of your great leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said — the time is always right to do what is right. I believe that, and I always try to do what is right, but what good does it do me, what difference does it make? To you, I’m just a name in a story — Uriah the Hittite — it sounds like a character Han Solo might encounter in the Mos Eisley Cantina.

In the story you have read today from 2 Samuel 11 — quite a troubling story, by the way, especially for me — I am clearly overshadowed by David. He is the king, after all, a man after God’s own heart, according to 1 Samuel 13:14. I’m not so sure after this story. What sort of God would he be like? A lustful, violent, selfish God who abuses power and privilege and then tries to blame everyone else? There may be something God-like still in the man, and there is value in that, in the idea that God can work in and through flawed people, but David clearly messes up here, messes up badly.

And yet, there is no such thing as bad press. Some people seem to be covered in Teflon. No matter what David does — good or bad — he just seems to get more attention, more press, more love. Everyone knows about the great King David...

And Bathsheba, I am overshadowed by her too in this story, though I am okay with that, as long as you get the facts straight. She is my wife... was my wife. She is the daughter of Eliam, who, like me, is a member of the king’s elite group of loyal fighters known as “the thirty,” David’s special ops team.

For those doing the fact check on this, just read 2 Samuel 23:34-39 or 1 Chronicles 11:41. Bathsheba is from a good family, and she marries a good man, if I don't say so myself. The day the king notices her, ogles her, stalks her, she is just taking a bath. She does nothing out of the ordinary, nothing provocative.

So, do not follow the age-old pattern of blaming the victim, especially if the victim is female and the perpetrator is a powerful male. It may be easy to laugh at Grumpy in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* when he says that females are full of wicked wives, but there are actually people who believe this, people who are always ready to blame the woman, always ready to let the man off the hook.

I would have thought that by your time, roughly 3,000 years after mine, with all of your technological and intellectual advances — going to the moon — surely you would have given up this distorted view and all the cop-outs that go with it! But from what I can tell, on a number of moral matters like this, you haven't come very far. Powerful men still get away with murder and mayhem, and blaming some woman.

So, I don't mind if Bathsheba overshadows me — I love her — as long as you don't buy all the disinformation that abounds about her. She is the victim here, along with me. And she rises above her suffering. Indeed, she is one of four women listed in the genealogy of your Savior, Jesus, in the first chapter of Matthew, though she is not called by name. She is simply “the wife of Uriah” and “the mother of Solomon.”

But make no mistake, Bathsheba is a victim. David is the aggressor, the perpetrator. He is the one in control every step of the way. He decides not to accompany his troops in battle but to stay home. Perhaps this is not enough to condemn him, even though the text says it is spring, the time of year when kings go out to battle. David has not been a coward in the past. His advisors have expressed concern about him taking risks. He doesn't need to foreshadow Captains Kirk and Picard and take part in every dangerous away mission.

But not only does he choose to stay home; he chooses to walk about on his rooftop, rather than work, and peer about the neighborhood. His home is the tallest building. So, he can see into everyone's living space, everyone's business, and he sees a woman bathing — not sun bathing, putting on a show;

washing herself. He obviously finds her attractive, who wouldn't? She is gorgeous! But he could leave it here, do the right thing. He doesn't.

He wants to know who she is. He is told — she is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. So, he has another opportunity to resist his impulses. This is someone who should matter to him, a woman connected to people who have sacrificed much for him. This shouldn't make a difference. Every woman should be treated with dignity and respect, but in David's mind, who Bathsheba is might make a difference. It doesn't.

He sends his messengers to bring her to him, which they do, and you know the rest of the story. Mel Brooks might say, "It's good to be the king," but there is nothing good about this. David has sinned, and not just sinned, sinned in a way that will forever taint his reign.

Why do so many leaders with so much potential limit their impact with destructive behavior? The core problem here is not about lust and unfaithfulness, though they are certainly part of the story. The core problem is about the abuse of power and privilege. David assumes that since he is king, he can do whatever he wants, have whomever he wants, even if he has to take a woman by force. There is no other perspective here, no way to view David's actions as anything but despicable.

But you know something about this challenge of leadership, this kind of character flaw, and more than that, this kind of abuse of power and privilege at a cultural level. How many public leaders in your time have abused their power in this way? How many men have gotten away with David's behavior? And I haven't even finished detailing his crimes. It gets worse, if you can believe that, but lest David's wrongful actions continue to overshadow my decency, let me tell you a little bit about myself and by contrast make these final points about our fine king.

What is my part in this story? Well, when it is discovered that Bathsheba has become pregnant, David has me sent home from battle, where I have been risking my life for him. He wants me to spend time with my wife. He uses language you may not understand, but trust me, he wants me to spend time with my wife, so that it may be claimed that I am the father of the child. How can I do that when my companions are fighting a war? I cannot. David even gets me drunk, hoping that with my inhibitions down, I will give in and

do what he wants. I will not. The time is always right to do what is right. I am faithful to my wife, I am loyal to my king and country and fellow soldiers, I am devoted to my God and faith and understanding of righteousness. I will not be moved.

So, what is the reward of my faithfulness? The king has me sent to the battle front so that I will be killed, and he can have my wife. He may not swing the sword, but he kills me just the same. He is a murderer and an adulterer, and at least an assaulter, if not a rapist — this man after God's own heart. And I am the one who discovers that no good deed goes unpunished, at least in this life. Some might call me foolish, not to have given in and seen my wife, but at the end of the day, the last thing a man or woman has is our character, our beliefs, our values, our honor. If I had given up that, what would have been the point in living? I still believe there is value in things like honor, character, and integrity. I still believe in doing the right thing no matter what the consequences.

Perhaps this much is worth remembering. You will have to decide. But things like honor, character, and integrity matter, and sometimes these qualities are found not in the best-known stories, but in people who might be overlooked, ordinary people who just go about their lives and work in the right way treating everyone with dignity and respect.

The finest police officers, firefighters and healthcare workers; schoolteachers, administrators and childcare workers; people who labor in thankless jobs at all levels of public life to provide services we only notice when grumbling about some problem with them; those in all forms of national service, including military service, missionaries and those who serve in the Peace Corps; sales clerks — we may be tempted to overlook them, but their stories are worth remembering because they do the right thing, even during a pandemic, with no guarantee of reward, just the knowledge that they are doing what is right.

From this perspective, I suppose my life does matter. But it's not important that you remember me. What's important is that you remember the values that shape my life. Because if you do, if you just try to do the right thing, your life will matter too.