

Pastor Shaun Arndt

February 17, 2021

Ash Wednesday

Sermon Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-13

How Could He!?

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

A respected sports hero gets caught cheating. A trusted family member commits a heinous crime. A best friend betrays you. At such times we might say or at think: **How Could She? How Could He?!** That person acted in a way we didn't expect. What they did shocked us to the core.

How Could He? seems like a fitting response when we read about King David's horrible and disgraceful fall into sin in 2nd Samuel.

After all, *this is David*. The Holy Spirit used David to write important portions of the Bible. David wrote many of the Psalms we sing in church, Psalms that foretold the person and work of Christ.

This is the David that wrote Psalm 23- *the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want!* The Lord raised David up from tending sheep to be the King of Israel and a picture of that greater shepherd King to come, our Lord Jesus. This is the David who so boldly trusted God's promises that he boldly ran into battle against the enormous elite Philistine warrior Goliath. About David God once said: **I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart.** (Ac 13:22).

So **How could he?!** How could this hero of faith fall so far that the prophet **Nathan** had to confront the king and wake him up to the despicable act of his sin with that parable about the rich man who would callously steal and butcher the poor man's pet lamb, a story bound to strike home to David, the former shepherd.

That story fit David to a tee. David had been blessed by God in so many ways, and yet David **despised the word of the Lord** as he **did** and continue to do **evil**.

1 Samuel 11 lays it all out: First David failed to do his job and march out with army to fight for God's people. Then he lusted after the wife of one of his most loyal and trusted soldiers and slept with her. When she became pregnant from the affair he tried to cover it up with lies, but when that failed David arranged for her husband **Uriah** to be murdered on the battlefield.

And then David pretends to be the good guy and take in this pregnant widow of a fallen soldier to be his wife. Refusing to repent and admit his sin, David wades into dangerous unbelief by covering up and cherishing his sin. So **How could He?**

David himself wrote down in the words of Psalm 51 that we sang earlier: **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**

Just like all of us, David had a sinful heart condition from the instant his life began in his mother's womb. This original sin inherited from Adam and Eve, this sinful nature human beings are born with has no

true fear of God and no faith in God and is constantly eager to produce all kinds of sinful thoughts, words and actions: like David's lust, fear, pride, adultery and murder.

How could he?! Because people with sinful hearts—sin! The sinful nature remains in believers and is constantly at work, joining in with the devil and the world's temptations to pull us into evil and unbelief at any time.

What a warning! And what a lesson for us! The same treacherous sinful heart in David lives in you and me.

If a great hero of faith like David could fall into shameful sin and lose his faith or come close to losing faith, than so can we. Any of us could fall into any sin. Don't just take my word for it, listen to what God's Word tells us: **If you think you are standing firm, be careful you don't fall!**

You see, to benefit from the Scripture lesson and for that matter to benefit from Lent, the real question we need to ask is not **How could David**, but *How could WE?!*

God has richly blessed us too! And yet we wade right into sin also. In fact, if we don't see ourselves as sinners just like David who need to pray with David **Have mercy on me O God**, then we are in an even greater danger of being like the Pharisee in our Gospel lesson who *did not go home justified*, meaning he was not right with His God, but condemned.

But come on, David committed adultery! Well even if we have not misused God's good gift of sex by using it outside of marriage, yet Jesus words in Matthew condemn: **anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.** Every way our eyes wander and our hearts harbor impure thoughts, and we start to sink down to our culture's level when it comes to entertainment and morality, it all **despises the word of the LORD** that commands us to have both clean hands and pure hearts.

But David committed murder! Even if there is not blood on our hands, remember what Jesus taught: **anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Anyone who says to his brother you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell.** And **brother** does not mean just your sibling, but your fellow human being, including the lousy driver on the road in front of you and those in media and internet that make our blood boil.

And if we think we can be ok with God just by avoiding the huge and shameful versions of sins against certain commandments, as though we could win heaven by actually not taking human life, then we're in danger of a bigger lie than David's when he tried to cover up his crimes.

Namely, buying into the devil's ancient lie that we can know better than God and God should be satisfied with our shoddy and sin stained attempts at goodness, that God should dance to our tunes and our 'good enough!' Or that we can be okay, as long as we're not as bad as sinners like a murderer and adulterer like David! Those would be the lies that 1 John warns against: **If we claim we have not sinned we make Him (God) out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.**

So on this Ash Wednesday, repent. Repent with hearts humbled and crushed by God's law as it shows us as we really are: sinners with sinful hearts.

Sinners **from birth**, sinners who have repaid God's limitless goodness with countless wrongs of heart and hand and mouth. Sinners who even on our best days, have nothing perfect enough for the holy God and so

join David in the words of his Psalm: **Against you (Lord) have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.** Sinners who have earned the same death sentence David unwittingly pronounced on himself.

Sinners... who by God's grace and the Holy Spirit's working, can confess with David: **I have sinned against the LORD.**

And then, let us ask one more time: **How Could He?!** Not David, not you and me, but **How Could He?** How could God do this shocking, startling thing He does?! What He did for David, what He does for us, what the prophet Nathan announced: **The LORD himself has put away your sin. You will not die.**

Just like that, David's pastor Nathan pronounces absolution. David's murder—forgiven. Our murderous thoughts of spite, jealousy, revenge and unrighteous anger in the heart—forgiven.

David's guilt for adultery—gone. The guilt for our impure thoughts, words, actions, watching what we shouldn't have—gone.

The punishment for David's sinful pride and rebellion, **despising God's Word** and doing **evil** in His sight—removed. The punishment for our sinful hearts and the countless ways they have led us to **despise God's Word** and do what is **evil** in His sight—removed.

Yes, David would experience consequences for his sinful actions, but that would no longer be punishment. The punishment that every sin deserves is death and hell. That punishment, that judgment for David, for you and me—completely **put away** so that it will not fall upon us.

But **How Could He?** How could God forgive sinners? One answer is the word **Grace** – the completely undeserved, unearned love of God, this attitude in His heart and nothing in us. **Mercy** – that He does not treat us as our sins deserve.

How Could He? Because He is Who He is, the **LORD, the LORD, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness... forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin** (Exodus 34:6-7).

How Could He forgive us? **The LORD himself has put away your sin.** The Hebrew phrase for **put away** could be literally translated as **He caused your sin to pass over, or cross over.** That is, He took our sin and made it go elsewhere, He caused it to *cross* over onto someone else, **He put it away**, by **putting** it upon another.

David's sin. Your sin. My sin. It was all **put** onto Jesus Christ. Jesus who is the **LORD Himself.** Jesus who is holy and has no sin of His own. Jesus who is both David's descendent and David's Lord. Jesus who willingly carried the guilt and punishment and evil of the world to the cross and let the hell and death it deserved fall upon Himself to spare us.

The LORD Himself has put away your sin. You will not die. How Could He? Because this is what Lent and Easter, the heart of our faith is about. We live because Jesus took our death.

We **will not die** but live on in the Lord's presence when our bodies die. And we **will not die** because Jesus will rise our bodies up to endless life as He shares with us the fruits of His own resurrection from the dead! Jesus took what we earned and gives us what only He deserves.

How Could He? Because, to quote David one last time: **The LORD is good... His mercy endures forever.** Amen. (1 Chronicles 16:34)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew as right spirit within me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit. Amen.