

Confronting Sin I Kings 1:1-37

Bathsheba was in a terrible spot. David's oldest living son, Adonijah, had proclaimed himself to be the new king, the successor to King David. And he had assembled a coalition of powerful and influential people who supported his claim to the throne. Joab, David's first cousin and the commander of the armies of Israel, stood behind Adonijah. And so did Abiathar the high priest, the religious leader of the people. Moreover, Adonijah had solicited the support of all the rest of David's sons, inviting them to his coronation ceremony and thus assuring them that he would not try to eliminate them as potential rivals.

Oh, but there was one son of David that didn't get an invitation: Solomon, Bathsheba's son. For it turns out that David had made a promise to Bathsheba that Solomon, not Adonijah, would be the next king of Israel. So, as the prophet Nathan pointed out, as long as Solomon and Bathsheba lived, there would be a cloud on Adonijah's title to the throne: and no king could be expected to tolerate such a dangerous situation for long.

So yes, Bathsheba was in a terrible spot. She and her son Solomon were in great danger. But how could she get David to do something about it? Oh, she had once been David's favorite wife. After all, he had literally killed for her, putting her first husband to death just so that he could marry her. But since that time, David's courtiers had forced her out of his arms and out of his bed, replacing her with another woman, someone they were more confident could take care of the king's needs. And in Bathsheba's disappointment, she had to wonder: did David still care enough about her to try to keep the promise he had made so many years before? Or was he only interested in younger, more beautiful Abishag?

Oh, and why had David's courtiers insisted that Abishag replace Bathsheba? Because David was just a shadow of his former self. The once mighty warrior was so old and feeble that he was unable even to keep himself warm: that's why he needed a young, healthy nurse to be close to him all the time. So, how could this shell of a man possibly stand up against all the people who had assembled in support of Adonijah? Again, Bathsheba had to wonder: even if David had been willing to keep the promise he had made to her, would he be able to do it?

But that wasn't even the worst of it. For it turns out that Bathsheba's problem was, in a very real sense, David's fault. You see, David had fallen into the kind of sin that is all too familiar to so many of us: enabling the bad behavior of those we love. For verse 6 makes it quite clear that David had never tried to discipline his son Adonijah. In fact, even when Adonijah had taken to acting like a king, traveling around in a grand procession, David had never tried to put a stop to his ambitious, pretentious behavior. So there was just no getting around it: Bathsheba would have to confront David about his sin if she and her son were to be saved.

And maybe you can sympathize with Bathsheba today. Maybe you know what it's like to have someone you love break a promise to you, or just to drift away from you. Or maybe you know how hard it is to see someone you love neglecting his or her responsibilities or even engaging in sinful behavior.

And maybe, like most of us Southerners, you do the very best you can to avoid any sort of conflict or confrontation with anyone. But maybe you've found yourself in a situation that can't be ignored or glossed over with a "bless your heart." Maybe there's a real problem involving real people that really needs to have something done about it. And you don't have a clue about where to begin.

So, what options did Bathsheba have? Well, she could have done what so many queens have done throughout the centuries. She could have tried to curry favor with whoever happens to be in power in order to retain her status and influence. Cleopatra, for example, dumped her husband, Ptolemy XIV

(who was also her brother), to cozy up to Julius Caesar, who then supported her claim to rule over Egypt. Later, when Mark Antony gained control of the eastern Mediterranean, she persuaded him to marry her and to give all of Rome's possessions in the area to her and her children. Surely, Bathsheba could have tried to cast a similar spell on Adonijah.

Or, she could have played power politics, assembling her own coalition to bolster Solomon's claim to the throne. After all, she still had Nathan the prophet on her side, as well as Benaiah and the rest of David's mightiest warriors. Surely, many of the people of Israel would follow such leaders in recognizing the promise David had made to Solomon. But if Bathsheba had tried to protect herself and her son in such a way, she would have plunged the nation into civil war.

On the other hand, she could have tried to strongarm David, either turning on the tears and blaming him for allowing her to suffer, or fussing at him about his penchant for enabling his children's bad behavior. In short, she could have tried to bully David into giving her what she wanted.

We've seen all these kinds of tactics, haven't we? We've seen those who plot and scheme to get their way, gathering sympathizers to take their side in a dispute. And we've seen those who try to overawe people with their education or abilities, or who just try to shout their opponents down, hurling abuse at them. But as our modern federal politics so clearly demonstrates, such a polarizing approach only leads to acrimonious gridlock. And no one really wins when we are at each other's throats.

But Bathsheba took a different tack, showing us a much better way to confront sin. In fact, in New Testament terms, we might say she chose the way of the cross. For instead of bullying David, taking advantage of David's growing weakness, she humbled herself before him (verse 16), even addressing him as "lord" (verse 17). Instead of criticizing David for not controlling his children, she insisted on treating him like the king he still was, giving him the respect he deserved.

And instead of accusing David of neglecting his duties, she simply reminded him of the promise he had made to her and Solomon (verse 17). Moreover, she gave David the benefit of the doubt, claiming that he must not have known what Adonijah was doing (verse 18). But even while she was so humble and gentle and respectful, she minced no words, making the reality of the situation quite clear: Adonijah had effectively seized the reins of power (verse 18) by gathering an influential group of followers around him. Oh, and she reminded David that if he didn't stop Adonijah, she and Solomon would soon find their heads on the chopping block (verse 21).

Yes, Bathsheba shows us the humble, respectful, gracious way that we are called to bring other people's sin to their attention, even when their sin has caused us great pain. That is, after all, what the Son of David taught us: to love our enemies, and to pray even for those who go so far as to persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

And Jesus lived out those words, didn't He? For as He laid down His life on the cross, He was making it perfectly clear just how serious our sin problem is. He didn't minimize the deadly nature of any rebellion against God. And yet He died, not for those who were loyal and faithful to Him, but for those who abandoned Him and denied Him. He went so far as to ask God to forgive those who nailed His hands and feet to the cross (Luke 23:34). Oh yes, in her humble and gracious, yet honest and forthright way, Bathsheba walked the way of the cross as she confronted David about his sin.

But it turns out that David did too. For he didn't become angry with Bathsheba when she pointed out his enabling, neglectful ways. He didn't storm off, or say abusive things to her or call her names. He didn't try to justify himself or make excuses for abandoning his duties as a father and a king. In fact, he didn't even plead his own obvious ill health to explain his lack of leadership.

Instead, David also walked the way of the cross. He gave Bathsheba the courtesy of calling her back into his presence to announce his decision to her, face-to-face (verse 28). And he admitted that she was right: that he had in fact made a promise to her that her son Solomon would succeed him as king of Israel (verse 30). David thus shows us that that the way of the cross is the way of humble confession. For if we would claim Christ's sacrifice as our own, we must be willing to abandon our pride, admitting that we are nothing more than sinners who richly deserve the pain and suffering, the shame and death that He took in our place.

But the way of the cross is also the way of repentance, for we must not just admit what we have done, both to God and to those whom we have harmed. No, we must also turn away from our sin and turn to God in grateful obedience, doing whatever we can to make things right with those whom we have hurt.

And that's exactly what David did. Notice that in verse 30, he proclaims that he would make Solomon king that very day. In other words, because David had come to the conclusion that he was no longer able to rule in an effective way, he would give up his own power, allowing Solomon to be crowned in his place while he himself was still alive.

And that's exactly what happened. Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and all the mighty men gathered around Solomon and anointed him with oil. And once Solomon was thus crowned, Adonijah's conspiracy fell apart. All of those who had been so impressed with Adonijah's good looks and pompous pretensions, all those who said they wanted Adonijah to rule over them, well, they scattered from him in fear (verse 49). In fact, Adonijah went so far as to throw himself on the mercy of Solomon, begging for his life (verse 51).

Oh yes, David made good on his promise, turning away from his neglectful, enabling ways, and keeping the vow he had made to Bathsheba and to God. And as a result of his confession and repentance, because he was willing to give up his own power and authority for the sake of his kingdom, the danger of a civil war was averted, Solomon and Bathsheba were safe, and God's will for the royal succession was accomplished.

But none of this would have happened if Bathsheba hadn't taken the first step, if she hadn't been willing to remind David of His promise, humbly, graciously and lovingly confronting him about his sin. And none of this would have happened without David's humble, gracious willingness to admit his neglect and his need to make a change.

And so the same question faces us that faced David and Bathsheba. We can go on doing the Southern thing: avoiding conflict, allowing our grievances to fester until they explode. Or we can confront sin in a Christlike way, both in our own lives and in the lives of those whose sin affects us. We can humble ourselves before one another, speaking and receiving the difficult truths that we all need to hear.

So will we allow our fear to keep us from speaking or our pride to keep us from hearing? Will we allow the devastating consequences of sin to continue, both for us and for others? Or will we walk the humble, self-denying way of the cross?