

Repentance, Forgiveness, and Sin's Consequences

SCOTT HOEZEE

There are few questions quite as pastorally and theologically difficult as this one: Does God still punish us for our sins, even though we know as baptized people that God forgives all our sins? And inevitably, in the conversations that surround the attempts to answer that tough question, we may start to see if there are any differences between punishments and consequences. Can our sinful actions sometimes carry natural consequences that need not be seen as a direct punishment? Today on *Groundwork*, we will look at that second part of the dreadful story involving David and Bathsheba, where precisely these issues come up. So, stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, just to recap, we are doing just two programs on the stories we read from 2 Samuel 11 and 12. In the previous program, we dug into the story of that time in 2 Samuel 11, when David, maybe in the throes of some kind of a midlife crisis, has an affair with a neighbor woman named Bathsheba, but the affair resulted in a pregnancy that David was desperate to cover up, but when Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, proves to be a better man than David, thus foiling David's every attempt to make it look like Bathsheba's husband was the father of the child within her, David arranges for Uriah's death.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see a very different David than we have seen up to that point. David, who, I guess he has the highlight film of things he has done right. In this situation, we see the darkness of his heart, where he covets another man's wife, and he has an affair. He then has a coverup that he is trying to do. When it is all said and done, and Uriah the Hittite is dead, he thinks that after he moves Bathsheba in, it is over; but then, the narrator reminds us: This thing that David did displeased the Lord. And leaves that hanging out there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the last verse of 2 Samuel 11; so, how does 2 Samuel 12 begin? This way: The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." ⁵David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, as surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it is interesting how Nathan comes to David in this situation. I mean, we talked about this in the other episode, the first episode, that if you are king, you cannot just walk up and say: Hey, you're wrong. Because that could cost you your life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, even Nathan the prophet finds a creative way to explain something that has happened, and David just kind of takes it hook, line and sinker. He does not realize what is going on here, but he comes to a conclusion that elicits a response from the prophet's story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I have always thought, Darrell, that that little parable Nathan told is kind of like way too obvious; it is like, you know, come on, David, can't you see he is talking about you here? Can't you see that he is talking about recent events? But it doesn't happen. I mean, for one thing, David should have been wondering: Wait a minute; wait a minute: I am the King of Israel. This is the lead prophet of God in Israel; and you are telling me this little domestic dispute? I mean, this is below my pay grade. I mean, if you are president of the United States, your aide is not going to bring a complaint from somebody in Sioux Center, Iowa, who thinks the police gave them an unfair parking ticket. I mean, the President doesn't deal with that kind of thing; and so, also David and the number one prophet in Israel shouldn't be dealing with this little story, but David doesn't seem to notice.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; the thing that is really tragic about it is that David is so not self aware that he doesn't realize that this is about him until Nathan the prophet hits him with a zinger.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, David just takes the story at face value. He doesn't wonder why he is being bothered with this minor affair. He doesn't wonder if it has anything to do with him. What can explain that, Darrell? Why isn't his sin against Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah weighing more heavily on his heart, such that it should be the first thing he would think of when Nathan comes to him? I think we know that answer, and it is called self-deception.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, self-deception when we rationalize...I have heard it being told to me like this...when we rationalize, we tell ourselves rational lies...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, very nice.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, where we actually believe the things that we are telling other folks about ourselves. This air...this thing we are hiding behind...this pretending, it kind of keeps us distracted. Sometimes when people do things to you and they hurt you, they don't even remember they did it; so you have to remind them: Listen, you hurt me; and David has not really thought about the fact that, even though Bathsheba is in the backroom here, that he has done all these things to try to cover up his sins.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, he might have rationalized too by saying: You know, well, yes; for ordinary mortals what I did was wrong, but I am the King! I have a high office. I have to protect my office at all costs. So, for *me* to

do this is okay. I am more important than the average Joe; so, I had to protect my royal position. So, not a big deal.

As rationalization goes and self-deception goes, David might even have gotten to the point of saying: If Uriah had just obeyed my orders, it wouldn't have come to this. There is probably a way to make me look like the victim here, David is thinking, right? Add it all up, and it is self-deception—classic self-deception; and unfortunately, Darrell, that is something we are all familiar with if we are honest.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; you know, I didn't really mean to swear, but the guy cut me off when I was driving, so he kind of had it coming...

SCOTT HOEZEE

I was provoked.

DARRELL DELANEY

If you didn't say what you said or do what you did, then I wouldn't have retaliated with a fit of rage and anger at you. So, you are kind of to blame here; I think that even comes from scripture: Hey, God; remember the woman you gave me? This is the reason I fell off into sin and disobedience. It is like the blame-shifting that happens, and how we separate ourselves from what we have done is the only provision that we can make as sinful people. God doesn't make that distinction, though.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, no; I mean, when we say: Yeah, I just did something wrong, but I had my reasons...what else could I have done? Or, you know, we sometimes may even believe some of the vital lies in our culture, like the one contained in the popular advertising slogan: What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right; I am sure. Like a friend who has a church in New York City. On her church sign recently, she said: What happens in Vegas is forgiven here. Because it doesn't actually stay in Vegas. And we rationalize in our own lives, too, you know. We do something bad...and David has done two terrible things here. He has busted two of the Ten Commandments on adultery *and* murder, right? Sometimes, even when we recognize, yes, okay; I goofed; I sinned; I did the wrong thing; I said the wrong thing; but yeah...no, in the grand scheme of things, compared to the horrible things other people did... I mean, what I did was just a little peccadillo...it was just a trifle...it's nothing. So, self-deception, as my friend Neal Plantinga says: There are two steps to self-deception: First, we deceive ourselves, and second, we convince ourselves that we didn't deceive ourselves. So, it is sort of a double bind.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is interesting how we judge people by their actions, but we judge ourselves by our intentions. I didn't mean that...I didn't mean for it go so bad; but it did because *you* were not paying attention to the damage of that. And Nathan realizes, by God's prompting, that David does not realize that implications of what he has done and how it will ripple through his life; and so, Nathan has to get his attention somehow with this story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; I mean, you watch David's reaction here: He burns with anger against the man about the little ewe lamb, right? And you know, sometimes, as we say about clueless people, even today: What do I have to do? Whack you upside the head with a 2x4? Well, as a matter of fact, yes; and in just a moment, Nathan is going to reach for his metaphorical 2x4 to give David a whack upside the head. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are in 2 Samuel 12, which is the follow-up chapter to Chapter 11, where the terrible sin of David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba, and his subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah to cover up his sin takes place. Nathan, who was the lead prophet in Israel, has come to David, told him this homely little parable about a rich man who has every advantage in the world robs a poor man of his most precious possession. The story was designed to provoke outrage, and that is exactly how David responds.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; David was upset and he said: Yes, this man must die! He's got to pay; he's got to pay four times. And so, he is really upset about a story that actually did not happen. It is a parable, and he doesn't see the connection of what his life has done; he doesn't see that this is the situation that he finds himself in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Off with his head, is David's response to the story of the rich man who devoured the poor man's pet lamb. He doesn't see it, so Nathan does as we just said. He has to whack David upside the head: Listen.

⁷Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'"

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, what is interesting to me is that God, when he is getting ready to give you a divine spanking, he reminds you of what he has done for you. Like, do you remember that I anointed you as king? Remember when you were the little guy that no one even wanted to come to the meeting, and I waited for you so that you could be anointed? Remember how I gave you the kingdom? Remember the things that I have done for you? Then he says: *You* killed him with a sword. David was at home. No; God sees that as: Oh, you used the sword of the Ammonites to kill Uriah; and so, God is holding him accountable for the things that he has done; and even though the initial sin with Bathsheba has not been mentioned, it is all implicated in the death of Uriah the Hittite.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; God through Nathan lays it on pretty thick here, you know: David, I gave you the sun, moon, and stars. The world is your oyster thanks to me; and if ever you found something else you might have wanted, all you had to do was ask. I probably would have given you that, too. In other words, David owed God big time, right? David needed to live out his every moment as a kind of extended thank-you card to God; but instead, David opted to take matters into his own hands; and what's worse, he did so by committing one terrible sin after the next. So, David not only failed to say thank you to God, through godly living, he spit in God's face by doing things expressly forbidden in the law and in the Ten Commandments.

DARRELL DELANEY

Just a note there, Scott. We are all supposed to live our lives as a thank-you card to God, in the things that we do...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

When we go contrary to the life that he has planned for us, then that is actually going to be a problem. So, David covets another man's wife; he has adultery with her; he lies about the situation and then he murders Uriah the Hittite. That is four of God's top Ten Commandments there; and you know, there are six others staring at him, because the Bible says in James: If you break one, you break them all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and finally, though, in verse 13 of 2 Samuel 12: Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

So, finally, an acknowledgment; finally, he comes clean; finally, he stops running; he stops lying; he stops hiding. I am the man. You are the man, Nathan says, and David says: Yes, I am afraid I am.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, David actually comes to grips with the fact that he is responsible for all of this. I think this is a moment of clarity that is...that is the beauty. We talked about this in the last episode: Accountability. This is the beauty of accountability. It can help us see our blind spots, and it can let us know: Hey, this is actually something where you are dropping the ball. If you are humble enough to listen, then God can use that to bring you to a place of repentance; and that is where, in Psalm 51, David cries out to God. He is saying:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

It is interesting that at the end of that he says: Against you and you alone; and not everybody else who was involved. He is talking to God about this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we mentioned that Psalm 51 is often attributed to having been written in response to this confrontation with Nathan. We don't historically know that that is true, but it could have been; and these sentiments certainly are what David felt.

It is interesting what you just said, Darrell. You know, in a lot of life, when we have done something wrong, we tend to think: Well, I sinned against so-and-so; I hurt so-and-so; I sinned against this person; I lied to this person; I stole something from this person; I said something mean to this person; so, it is just between me and the other person. I have to apologize to her; I have to make amends with him; but what we forget is that in the long run, every sin is a sin finally against God.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is definitely an affront against the holy God who calls us to live as holy as he does. So, not only have we broken relationship and fellowship with whoever we sinned against, we have broken, first and foremost, our relationship and fellowship with the God who calls us to live holy according to his standards.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nathan replies: ^{12:13}"The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. ¹⁴But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die." ¹⁵After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. ¹⁶David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. ¹⁷The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. ^{18a}On the seventh day the child died.

So, that is a bit bracing. Nathan says: You are forgiven, but...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and that but is really scary because, I mean, we know from reading the New Testament the wages of sin is death, right? So, it is mercy that God doesn't allow David to die in this situation. He deserves to, but then, the baby ends up dying; so, there could be consequences for the sins that we do, even if we are forgiven, that is the scary part.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and it doesn't end with the death of the child. Nathan also says: ^{verse 11}“Out of your own household, I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you. ¹²You did it in secret, I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel,” God says, and many of us know that beginning already in the next chapter, in 2 Samuel 13, things in David's household are going to unravel. One of his sons falls in love with one of his half-sisters...Amnon falls in love with Tamar, who is a full sister of Absalom. He rapes Tamar...Amnon rapes Tamar. This infuriates Absalom. He bides his time, but eventually Absalom kills Amnon, and then Absalom leads a rebellion. At the end of the day, Absalom is going to end up dead. So, this thing David did unravels his whole household in coming times.

DARRELL DELANEY

The sin has a ripple effect, and that is what God meant when he said to sword will never leave your house. I think that because David probably led a bad example. I don't know where these kids were when these things happened...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But they probably thought they could get away with something because from man's standpoint, they saw he got away with it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

David set a bad example. Maybe his son Amnon followed suit: Hey, if Dad got away with sexual shenanigans maybe I can, too. But what it leads to, Darrell, is something we know only too well, and that is something we can only call sinful, bad momentum. It kind of ricochets down the corridors of history. But Darrell, as we stated at the outset of this program, this story forces us to confront a very delicate and difficult question involving sin, forgiveness, and the consequences of our sin. As we round out this program and this series in a moment, we will consider all that, so do stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this whole program has led us to this fraught question: Does God still punish us for our sins, even if we are already forgiven?

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, I mean, we can look at the prophetic words from Isaiah 53 to help us broach the question. It says: ⁴Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here, Darrell, Isaiah is making clear...and sometimes Isaiah is even called the fifth gospel, you know, but Isaiah makes it clear that when God's suffering servant fully comes, all of the punishment for our sins will be laid on him, not us; all of them—all of the punishment we deserve fell on Jesus, and in the New Testament and particularly passages like the following in Romans 5, it is clear that is exactly the role Jesus took. Here is what Paul wrote to the Romans:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

So, short answer to the question: Does God still punish us as Christians? Does God punish us for our sins? No.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have been justified by his blood, so the eternal punishment and consequences long-lasting have been settled by Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection; but does that mean that we have no consequences for the things that happen? Well, I wouldn't be so sure about that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; certainly, we do take it seriously that all the punishment fell on Jesus. So, does God specifically punish us for our sins? No. We don't want an Old Testament story about David before the Advent, before the work of Christ...we don't want that to unravel that glorious part of the gospel's good news, that we are forgiven. God is not now punishing us for our sins. All the punishment fell onto Jesus Christ; but as you just said, Darrell, that still leaves open a question: Do the things we do still carry natural consequences?

DARRELL DELANEY

I believe they do, and I believe that even though God does not cause them, he can actually use them. I think for us, we just need to understand that, when we do sin, consequences will still happen in many cases. It doesn't mean that everything is going to stop and that everything is going to be great, but God can use this in order to discipline us and train us, like what it says in Hebrews 12. It says:

⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." ⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ^{10b}God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

So, it is a discipline. Even though God doesn't always cause it, he can use it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, are we splitting hairs in placing punishment and some form of discipline in separate categories? I don't think so, because this is a vital distinction. We don't want to wash out or diminish in the least that we are fully forgiven by grace alone. If God still punished us for our sin, that would mean he really hadn't put away our sins after all. The punishment didn't really all fall on Jesus; and we don't want to say that; however, God's grace does not mean that God is obligated to sever every connection between actions and consequences, right? I mean, if we abuse our bodies through unhealthy living or bad habits, God is not obligated to head off things like diabetes or lung cancer or scar tissue or cardiovascular disease. If we are consistently mean-spirited and cruel to other people, God is not obligated to make those people still be nice to us. If we get what we have coming to us, God doesn't have to head that off. It is not a punishment, but it is a consequence, through which maybe God can also discipline us.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is true, Scott. So, if I took this hand right now and I slapped you in the face, you would feel the pain of that; and then I could ask you for forgiveness and you would forgive me, but the lasting effect of what I did will still be with you whether you remembered it or you still had a mark on your face. I think that sometimes we expect that all the things will be made perfect and right once we confess these sins, but we do have to

realize that our life is a process of discipline, and that is actually the root of what a disciple is, is a person who undergoes a particular type of discipline that God has called them to; and God can use hardships, God can use setbacks, and even our mistakes. He doesn't waste a thing; he just recycles it all and uses it, and somehow gets glory out of it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; God somehow manages to turn to good even some of the bad stuff we bring on ourselves...the consequences of our actions; and we are thankful that God can do that; and in fact, in the larger story that we have been looking at in this program and the previous program, you know, we see that. So, we just saw that the first child...the child born of adultery by David and Bathsheba dies. But David and Bathsheba have another son, and his name was Solomon; and through Solomon, the family line of David would continue right on through to the birth of the ultimate Son of David named Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Jesus' genealogy is shown in Matthew 1. It says: Uriah's wife in there, and you know that is a reference to Bathsheba as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and the fact that Matthew mentions Uriah directly, the one David murdered, that is who Solomon's mother was, that just kind of twists the knife a little bit; but I think what Matthew was trying to say there, Darrell, is that even the terrible story that we have been looking at in these two programs was not going to derail God from bringing his Messiah. God's Messiah, Darrell, actually comes straight *out* of that kind of a sinful thing, because that kind of a sinful scenario is exactly why God sent his Son into this world.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is a beautiful testimony for us as well that even if our lives are broken and dysfunctional, God can still find a way to get the glory. He didn't take any of that stuff out of the Old Testament or out of the Bible. He wanted to show that could still work through it; and there is hope in the midst of things, even when life goes wrong; and we give glory to God for that; thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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