

Temptation, Trouble and Triumph
Behind the Veil: Women of the Bible
II Samuel 11:2-5
8-19-12
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The story of David and Bathsheba may remind you of the HBO hit show “Sex and the City.” But unlike “Sex and The City”, the lead female of this story isn’t out to find her man.

Bathsheba is a woman behind the Veil. She is a woman with a reputation that she doesn’t deserve.

Bathsheba was a woman of humble beginnings. She grew up in the shadow of the Palace. Her grandfather was an advisor to the King. Her father was one of the Kings 30 greatest warriors and she was married to one of the 30 most decorated warriors of King David’s army.

We know a lot more about King David. When we think about the people found in the scriptures it’s difficult to find someone more complex than King David. He rose to power from very humble beginnings. He followed a flawed King Saul. He is the greatest hero in the Old Testament. BUT the scriptures never try to make David a saint or to hide his humanity and his short comings.

The authors don’t try to hide his flaws and they don’t use his flaws to condemn him beyond redemption. They simply lets the story of David's life unfold – his loyalty to Saul, his deep and abiding friendship with Jonathan, his difficult marriage to Michal, his victories on the battlefield and his failures at home.

We can sum up David's greatest failures with the word “inaction.” For example, David does nothing when his son Amnon rapes his sister Tamar or when his son Absalom murders Amnon in revenge. When David send’s his men into battle he remains in the palace. Instead of leading his men into battle David places his nephew Joab in charge of the army. His “inaction” is highlighted by his practice of taking a nap in the afternoon while his men are fighting a Holy War.

It’s within this greater context that we find the story of David and Bathsheba. This is the story of a powerful King and a humble woman. He was a man of power and influence and she was a woman without power or position.

Bathsheba is a woman who has wrongly been called a temptress...a harlot...or worse by her critics. Her critics ask: What kind of a woman would bath in view of the King or any other man? Why was she bathing in public where the King or anyone else could see her? Was she looking for “Sex in the City” while her husband was off fighting in the war?

The best answers for these questions are found in the scriptures themselves and in the archeological evidence. You see...the scriptures teach us in Biblical times women were required to participate in a ritual cleansing following their menstrual cycle. They were impure and must be ritually cleansed before they could return to their homes or the synagogue.

Biblical and archeological evidence suggests the city was filled with homes with flat roofs which functioned as additional living space for the family. The roofs also held collection basins to gather the sparse rain water...to be used in the home. Women were often seen on their roofs gathering this water for use in their ritual baths. They would build a makeshift tent to provide privacy. But if by chance someone did see them they would know what they were doing.

Bathsheba was doing the same thing that every other woman did...she was taking a ritual bath of purification. This wasn't done in a cast iron tub with claw feet or a backyard hot tub. Water was too precious for such frivolous use. She would have taken something more akin to a sponge bath, which provided an opportunity for modesty.

But David did see her. He looked once...he looked twice...and he leered at her with sexual desire. He called upon his servants to learn her name. She was Bathsheba (daughter of the Oath), the wife of the King's trusted warrior Uriah...who was fighting with in his army....The army the King should have been leading.

We don't know what was going through Bathsheba's mind, because the story isn't told from her point of view. But some people naturally ask:

- What did she think when the King sent for her?
- Did she know his intentions?
- Did she go to him willingly?

We don't know the answers to these questions and we never will. Actually, the answers don't matter because we know what David did.

David was the King and he sent his messengers to fetch Bathsheba from her home. They escorted her to the palace. The palace was an intimidating place with guards stationed throughout to protect the King...and do his bidding. Bathsheba was brought to the King's bed chambers. The Bible reports King David calls Bathsheba to his bed and then he sent her home.

We know a little more about the biology of child birth than the Biblical authors, so it's natural for us to ask: did he send her home immediately or did he keep her in the palace for a few weeks? We don't know the specifics, but we know a short time later Bathsheba was with child.

As a man I can't begin to imagine what Bathsheba was feeling. She was a married woman that was "taken" by another man...the King! She discovered she was pregnant by the King while her husband was off fighting in a war. I would like to think she had a confidant...someone to talk to, but it sounds like she was all alone. She must have been scared because she knew the penalty for adultery was death by stoning. What could this humble...scared woman do?

It's safe to imagine she was filled with fear and trembling that she sent word to the King... informing him she was with child. While she awaited his reply she may have thought: He could deny his involvement and her plea for help. In fact, he could order her execution to protect himself and his reputation.

Instead, David tried to hide his adultery by calling Uriah home from the battle field under the premise that he wanted to learn news about the war. After speaking with Uriah, David tells him to go home and "**wash his feet.**" This is a euphemism for: "Uriah, go home and sleep with your wife."

Here the author introduces an ironic plot twist. Uriah is a Hittite, but he knows the Israelite custom that a man shall not sleep with his wife during a Holy war. So this non-Israelite is faithful to the law and he doesn't return to Bathsheba. Uriah, the foreigner, is more faithful than the King. And how is he rewarded for his faithfulness? David sends him to the front lines and his certain death.

This is not King David's finest hour. He has abused the power of his office by staying home and lounging around during a time of war; he committed adultery

with the wife of one of his greatest warriors; and then he essentially murders Uriah even though he doesn't raise his own hand.

When it seems all honor and faithfulness are lost God sends the prophet Nathan to hold David accountable for these immoral actions. And David is able to pull his life back together. David begins to pick up the pieces. First, he acknowledged his sin. Then he confessed it. He accepts responsibility for the consequences of his actions and, among other things; he welcomes Bathsheba into the palace as his wife.

But there is one more piece of bad news...David and Bathsheba's baby dies just a few days after its birth.

Following this tragedy and trouble there is Good News and there is triumph for Bathsheba. Bathsheba is moved from a position of humility to a position of royalty as the wife of King David. In the years that follow she gives birth to child who is named Solomon. She raises the boy with great care and helps him grow in knowledge and wisdom. Throughout the years she helps him gain favor in the eyes of David. At the end of David's life he names Solomon as his successor and Solomon becomes the wisest King of the united tribes of Israel. He rewards his mother and gives Bathsheba the position of the "Queen Mother" and a trusted advisor.

This woman behind the veil was able to overcome trouble by remaining faithful to God. She was able to overcome great disappointment and heart ache. She was able to overcome sorrow and death. By remaining faithful she was able to see hope in her future and was able to triumph because she recognized that God was at her side.

This is the Good News. God was with Bathsheba and in times of temptation and trouble. God is also with us! Amen.