

## **Power Corrupts and God Remembers**

### **2 Samuel 11:1-15**

I am so glad to be back home and see my church family. I had a wonderful time with Juhee and my friends in the Canadian Rocky Mountain. My body was sore, but hiking in the beautiful mountains was relaxing for me, though I am not sure about Juhee. I fully enjoyed my time away because our church has strong leadership, and many wonderful preachers. I was able to brag about Bishop sharing a message during my absence. I've heard so much good feedback about Tim's and Carl's sermons so I am considering taking more vacations, not for my sake, but for the church's. What do you think? Anyway, I am so glad to see you again.

One of the good things about camping deep in the mountains was that the internet connection was really bad so I was forced to do a digital detox for days. I could shut myself down from negative news from the world and fully enjoy God's wonderful creation. Of course, whenever I did get an internet signal, I checked the news and read disturbing news about the Trump assassination attempt. This is an extreme example and may be inevitable if we continue to hate one another in a polarized world. After coming back home, I as a clergy found more disturbing news about how both presidential candidates have used God for their political purpose. Donald Trump described surviving the shooting as "a providential experience" and claiming that "In a certain way, I felt very safe, because I had God on my side."<sup>1</sup> When political pressure to drop out of the presidential race was mounting, President Joe Biden said that only the Lord Almighty could convince him to end his bid for re-election."<sup>2</sup> I don't know how you feel about these political leaders using the name of God to support their political status, but I feel uncomfortable, very uncomfortable because they seemed to take the name of the LORD in vain. Even some of their claims are based on a toxic theology. One spectator was killed and two were critically wounded in the Trump assassination attempt. What happened to the other people if God intervened to save one person but not the other? We, Christians, should be more cautious when someone in power claims that God is on their side. In fact, being God's chosen one or chosen people does not mean that we are always on God's side.

### **David, the God's chosen one!**

Unlike the current and former Presidents of this country, we can say that king David was chosen by God and this is inarguable. Right? God sent Samuel to David to anoint him, making him the King of Israel. That's what the Bible witnessed. God is on his side and David eventually became the King. However, this doesn't mean that David was always on God's side. In today's scripture, we read the dark story of David. The story began, "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him." In an ancient world, it was king's duty to go out to war but David sitting on the throne decided to remain in Jerusalem. We don't know why David decided to abandon his duty but he had power and deployed this power. The first bad decision of abusing his power. What followed was a series of bad decisions and egregious abuses of power. "It happened, late one afternoon when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful."(v. 2) The Bible describes David's place as higher than the homes of others and David was on the elevated space of a rooftop. While his soldiers and even the ark of God dwelled in tents, David resided in a luxurious

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<sup>1</sup> <https://variety.com/2024/biz/news/donald-trump-god-rnc-nomination-1236077838/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2024/07/06/biden-interview-abc-news-debate>

palace and enjoyed his privileges and power. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And God remembers.

We know what happened next. “David sent messengers to GET Bathsheba, and she came to him, and he lay with her. Then she returned to her house.” Many biblical translations subtitle this chapter as “David commits adultery with Bathsheba.” But I think this is not an appropriate description of the situation. Throughout history, people have tried to excuse David by blaming Bathsheba, saying she was too beautiful and too available for him to resist, making him helpless before her charm. Or just like the subtitle implies, people try to describe their sexual relations as at least consensual. However, considering the power dynamics between them, it’s more appropriate to think Bathsheba was a victim of sexual violence and David a sex offender. David committed this horrible sin because he had power and he deployed his power to GET what he wanted. When David saw Bathsheba, he didn’t see a person; he saw an object to fulfill his desires. This is a stark example of how power can dehumanize others, reducing them to mere tools for personal gratification. Power corrupts and God remembers.

When Bathsheba sent word to the king that she was pregnant, king David continued to deploy his power to cover up his evil act. When his attempts failed, he plotted to kill Uriah, an honorable man who gave his loyalty to his king and nation. David did not see him as a loyal and faithful person but as a threat for his reputation. With the power he had, David tried to erase him to cover his sins. David's privileged status enabled him to hide his wrongdoing, even from his own consciousness. Power corrupts but God surely remembers.

### **Privileges and the abuse of power**

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” and no one is exempt from this rule. Even God’s chosen king, David, was not immune from corruption. In today's world, we see leaders claiming God’s favor to justify their actions. It’s crucial for us to critically evaluate these claims and ask not whether God is on their side, but whether they are on God's side. I believe you know the story of Abraham Lincoln. During the Civil War, Lincoln was asked if God was on his side. He replied, “My concern is not whether God is on our side. My greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.” We may not know if God is on someone’s side. But we can glimpse if someone is on God’s side by their actions and lives. Their faith is revealed through their compassion for others, especially, the marginalized and the poor. Their love for God is shown in how much they love all God’s children.

Of course, it’s easy to blame King David and his corruptness. It’s easy to blame powerful political figures in our time for the abuse of power. However, we also need to remember that we are not exempt from this. Though in a different capacity and scale, we all inhabit privileged spaces and have elevated powers we use or misuse in certain circumstances. Think of when you call customer service with a complaint. The power relation between you and the customer service workers are not equal. As you all know, early this year, I went on a short mission trip to Guatemala with Zion church members. On our way back home, a flight from Guatemala City to Miami was delayed and my group missed our connecting flight. We had to go to the desk for an available connecting flight. Unfortunately, there were no available flights that evening and even the next day in Miami. One option was to stay overnight in the airport and get a flight to Tennessee at 5 a.m. then catch a flight to Boston from there. I asked if hotel accommodations would be provided but was told, ‘no’ since the airline was not responsible for this delay. You can guess how I felt. Frustrated and angry. It’s not very pleasant. But I didn’t raise my voice because I saw a long line behind me and people at the desk had to say “I am sorry” to hundreds of people

and listen to their complaints. Some people expressed their anger to customer service workers who couldn't really fight back to them. What I would like to say is that we may not hold political office, but we all have power in various aspects of our lives. Whether it's in our workplaces, homes, or communities, we must ask ourselves: Are we using our power to uplift and support others, or are we misusing it for personal gain? Don't forget that we are God's children. So use your power as people on God's side.

### **God remembers...**

Of course, we often fail to be on God's side. Sometimes, like David, we misuse the power we have. Sometimes, we abandon our power to transform unjust situation because our small efforts for justice seems helplessness in the face of the greater evil in the world. But let us remember that God remembers, and God's justice prevails. God not only remembered what David did but also what Uriah did. David tried to erase his name along with his evil deeds, but God remembers Uriah who used his agency and power to be faithful to God. God put his name in the genealogy of Jesus. It was written, "David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife." (v 6) Yes. our God remembers. God remembers not just the powerful, but also the faithful who strive to do what is right.

Some of you may wonder, "What significance do my small acts of kindness have?" However, when constructing a building, the first thing we do is lay the foundation. We mix gravel and concrete and pour it onto the ground to create a solid base. Without the small stones and sand that go into this process, a large building cannot be built sturdily. Our small acts of kindness and obedience are like the necessary small stones and sand for building God's kin-dom on this earth. When all these small pieces come together, the pillars of God's justice and peace are established in this world. My beloved Asbury family, let us not give up and stand on God's side. Using the small and great strength God has given us, let us become God's co-workers in creating a more beautiful and just world. Amen.