The Killer King Sermon Series
#6 – The Greatest Loss
2 Sam. 18
July 20, 2014

We continue this morning looking at the roller coaster life of King David. We have witnessed his highest highs, like being anointed as the king of Israel and defeating the giant Goliath. We’ve also seen him at his lowest when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed to cover it up. We know he can be ruthless, but we’ve also witnessed the depth of his compassion, like his treatment of the lame man Mephibosheth, which Robyn preached on last week. This David guy is a complex character, and today’s story only adds to that complexity.

We’re going to cover the time span between David’s killing of Uriah and the events of 2 Samuel 18. I’m not going to read that whole chapter, but will be referring to key passages as we go along. I invite you to keep your Bibles open to 2 Samuel 18, or to simply sit back and hear the story.

When David was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his acts of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, David responded contritely with, “I have sinned against the Lord.” But that didn’t absolve him from the consequences of his actions. God tells David, “Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your enemy, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun.” In other words, for David, he made the decision not to turn away from sin, and now he must deal with the consequences. And there are always consequences.

A minister friend of mine told her congregation, “Next week I plan on preaching about the sin of lying. To help give you some context for my sermon, I want you all to read Mark 17 this week.” The following Sunday, the minister said to the congregation, “Last week I asked you to do some reading in preparation for this sermon. Now, how many of you read Mark 17 this past week like I asked? Please be honest.” After a few seconds, hands started going up until almost everyone in the sanctuary had their hand raised. The minister smiled and said, “Mark only has sixteen chapters. So let’s talk about the sin of lying, shall we?” When we make the decision to sin, there are consequences.

For David, those consequences are painful and divisive. The baby Bathsheba conceived with David dies right after childbirth. His family is rife with dysfunction as one of David’s sons, Absalom, kills his brother and then flees Jerusalem. When Absalom returns, he starts a plot to usurp his father’s throne and gains enough support that he forces his father David to flee Jerusalem. Finally, David musters up an army and prepares to fight his own son Absalom for control of Israel. All of this is a result of David’s one decision to commit adultery with Bathsheba. There are always consequences.

Our sins, no matter how big or how small, have consequences. If we make the choice to not address our sinful thoughts and actions, then we have to be prepared to face whatever consequences occur because of that. Or, as one person put it, “If you pick up a stick, you have to be willing to deal with what’s on the other end of the stick.” We can try
to ignore those consequences or blame them on someone else or run from them, but eventually, they catch up to us.

In college, a friend of mine named Tom had a problem with his car. His “check engine” light came on and wouldn’t go off. I was always afraid to ride with Tom, but he assured me it was no big deal. One day I got in his car and noticed the “check engine” light had gone off, so I asked him how he fixed it. He reached over to the dashboard and pulled off a piece of black electrical tape that he had put over the light. Out of sight, out of mind, right? Two weeks later his car broke down.

We have lights inside of us that go off when we know we’re moving into dangerous territory, don’t we? Our conscience, the God voice inside of us, will flash and say, “Whoa, be careful with that thought, that can be dangerous.” And we can choose to listen to this voice and deal with it, or we can put a piece of tape over it and hope it will go away. But if we do that, we have to be willing to accept the consequences.

King David learned this the hard way. He decided to ignore the flashing lights and warning signs and give into his temptation and desire for Bathsheba, and as a result his family broke down, leading to this confrontation between David and his son Absalom. I’m sure David never thought that this one bad choice would have such devastating effects. We rarely think about the consequences of our actions; it’s a lot easier to act and worry about those later.

Still, David does own up to his sin – “I have sinned against the Lord” – and receives forgiveness from God. But he still has to deal with the consequences. Does that bother you? After all, God forgave David. If that’s the case, why do these other things have to happen? There’s a fundamental distinction to be drawn here between punishment and consequences. David was spared from God’s punishment for his sins. He was forgiven by God, just as we all are through our faith. But being saved from punishment doesn’t mean we don’t have to deal with the resulting implications of our sinful actions.

God has given us the freedom to choose how to live, but if we do so in a way that is destructive to ourselves and others, there are consequences. These aren’t necessarily directly from God – God doesn’t send down lightning bolts to smite us. Consequences are different than punishment. Consequences are the naturally playing out of our own sinful decisions I don’t believe God enacts punishment when we sin; I believe the consequences of our sins are that punishment. And there are always consequences. If I sin, and in the process of sinning break my arm, I can come to God with a genuinely repentant heart and receive forgiveness, but I still have to deal with my broken arm. God’s not going to make that magically disappear.

That’s the difficult lesson David had to learn. In the battle between his and Absalom’s army, David asks his soldiers to deal gently with Absalom, even though Absalom is trying to kick David off the throne. We pick up the story in 2 Sam. 18:9: Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His hair caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. One of David’s men saw it, and told Joab, the army general, “I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.” Joab said to the man, “What, you saw him! Why didn’t you kill him? But the man said to Joab, “The king told us not to hurt him.” Joab said, “Fine, I’ll do.” He took three spears in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom. When David is told the news that Absalom is dead, he cries
out, ““O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Consequences. Is it any wonder that the division in David’s house included sexual immorality and murder? The old saying goes that, “The sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons.” David’s boys learned to commit adultery and murder from watching their father’s actions. David’s army general, Joab, is the one responsible for killing Uriah. He learned to do whatever was necessary to protect David, even murder. So is it any surprise that he murders David’s own son? They all learned from David that the only way to deal with a problem is to kill it. Our sins have consequences that go far beyond our control. So what do we do about this? If we are imperfect people who commit sins, and there’s no escaping our consequences, how do deal with them? I think there are two things we can do to help us with this.

The first thing we can do is change our perspective on dealing with sin. I don’t want to downplay the importance of God’s forgiveness, because that’s a cornerstone of our faith. But if we rely too much on God’s forgiveness, we can fall into the trap of abdicating our responsibility as a Christian, of treating God’s grace as a “get out of sin” card that frees us to sin all we want. Think of it this way: You’re charged with teaching a new driver how to drive a car. On the first day of class, you say, “Today we’re going to talk about your first crash. We’ll learn how to contact the police and exchange insurance information.” Now, this is important information, right? But you don’t want to start off talking about crashing. It’s called corrective thinking. If we only focus on what happens after we’ve sinned, we miss the chance to help ourselves avoid sin in the first place.

The alternative to corrective thinking is preventative thinking. If you teach that driving class how to obey the rules of the road and how to put safety first, you greatly reduce their chances of getting into a crash. Similarly, if we can focus on how we can stay away from temptation and how we can say “No” to avoid destructive behavior, we can reduce our need to call on God’s forgiveness. Had David practiced preventative thinking when he first saw Bathsheba, he wouldn’t have needed to utter the corrective statement, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

But nobody’s perfect, right? We can’t always avoid crashing, and the time will come when we are in need of God’s forgiveness and have to lie in the bed we’ve made. So the second thing we can do when facing our consequences is just that: face them. We can’t run from them or avoid them or try to stuff them off on somebody else. That would only get us into more trouble. The best we can do is confess to God, receive God’s forgiveness, and then trust that God is beside us as we deal with what’s on the other end of the stick.

God was with David, even as he watched his family unravel. After her first child died, his wife Bathsheba gave birth to another son named Solomon, who would go on to continue David’s reign and would build the first temple dedicated to God. Despite the mess we can make of our lives, God can work through all situations – even those we bring upon ourselves – to bring about God’s good will, if we turn to God and ask forgiveness. I believe that part of receiving God’s grace means that God, in forgiving us, gives us the strength to endure the consequences and will help us learn from them. Let us be thankful that, no matter how far we run from God, no matter how egregiously we disobey God, no matter how many times we sin, God never stops loving us. And the power of the love is stronger than any consequence we face.