

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

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; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

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. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife?"

As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die."\*

## **The Cost of Exploitation** - July 25, 2021

*2 Samuel 11:1-15*

This week we saw the second billionaire rocket himself into space. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos joined Richard Branson in the DIY rocket club. Fulfilling a childhood dream, Bezos took three others 62 miles above the earth into what is technically called “the edge of space.” He and his group experienced weightlessness for 4 minutes and got a spectacular view of the Earth, showing that it really is round. All that for an investment exceeding 20 billion dollars. Don’t worry, if you want to get in on the fun, you can! If you have a spare half-million or so with nothing to do, you can take your own space journey for 15 minutes or so. I wonder if the girl who got smacked by a seagull on an amusement part ride in Wildwood this week had almost as much fun? She certainly paid less!

Yes, yes, we have heard the defense of Bezos and Branson spending their billions on a joy ride. Yes, they are pioneering technologies that can and will make space accessible to more people. Yes, the first commercial airplanes were hugely expensive and now many more people can fly. When automobiles started in the early 1900s, gasoline sold for the equivalent of \$15 a gallon! No question, many ideas and technologies that we take for granted today were ridiculed when they first debuted. Believe me, if going up in Branson’s space plane cost \$500 instead of \$500,000, I would definitely consider it!

No, making fun of dreamers doesn’t pay off because the only way the quality of human life improves is when enough people listen to the dreamers and make their ideas reality.

I bring up Jeff Bezos today not because of his space adventure, but of what he said afterwards. When he was back on the ground, Bezos said, “I want to thank every Amazon employee and every Amazon customer, because you paid for all of this.”

Bezos is the world’s richest man. He is worth over \$200 billion dollars. Just about all of us buy from Amazon, don’t we? So we have also contributed to Bezo’s fortune. He thanked us, too. Are you aware that Amazon is alleged to create difficult working conditions for its warehouse employees and drivers? They are held to quotas so stringent that some workers have to improvise their own bathroom facilities on the warehouse floor or in their vehicles. Ordering from Amazon can be a very impressive experience, but do we ever consider the workers who make those deliveries possible? Do we consider that Amazon actually drives down the wages in many areas they set up facilities?

Furthermore, do we really contemplate the items that we order from Amazon? The clothes, the shoes, the whatever? How were they made? Who made them? Were the people in, say, China, who built our Xboxes or MacBooks fairly paid and fairly treated?

Friends, if I were in charge of the world, I would require every teenager to spend a few years after graduation to live somewhere in the world way out of their comfort zone. The most significant experiences in my life have been the ten years I've spent living in Botswana, South Africa, and Zambia. I lived and worked with people who were no different from me in terms of intelligence and ability, yet lived in considerably more difficult circumstances than almost anyone in this country.

Consider that in the United States, we are literally having to dispose of millions of doses of the Covid vaccine because millions have been duped into believing lies on the internet — this, even as infection rates are climbing and we all may have to wear masks again. This is happening — this massive waste of life-saving medication — even as the vast majority of the world is begging for the inoculations we foolishly refuse.

If you are disturbed by these huge inequalities in our nation and in our world, I'm glad, because you should be, you must be. The reality of life and living is and has always been that the systems of the world are founded on exploitation, plain and simple.

Where does our food come from? Have you ever traced the process that puts a strawberry on your breakfast table? From the farmer who planted and watered it to the worker who picked it to the driver to transported it to the clerk who put it on the shelf to the cashier who processed your order. Not to mention the water and power used to grow that strawberry? Apply the chain to any aspect of life and you will quickly discover that our personal enjoyment is often satisfied at the expense of other human beings or damage to the earth. In short, exploitation.

Exploitation is very much the theme of today's scripture. I hope you recall the quote at the beginning of our worship service. Oscar Wilde observed, "In war, the strong make slaves of the weak, and in peace the rich makes slaves of the poor." Well, it was wartime, and King David, the beloved King David, the one who danced as he brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem, King David had sent his army to war, but this time, he didn't go with his troops. Instead, he abandoned his responsibility and staying back home in his palace, a tall building on a hill which overlooked the city of Jerusalem. And David went out on his balcony and started looking where he shouldn't be looking. And David saw a woman named Bathsheba taking a bath on the roof of her home, assuming that no one could see her.

But David did. And because he was King, it was a simple matter to have Bathsheba brought to his palace where he frankly raped her. Bathsheba was married to a man named Uriah, one of David's soldiers fighting for him. Unfortunately, the scripture doesn't say what Bathsheba thought of all of this. I'll be honest, as a male, I have never felt exploited sexually, although other men and

boys have been. However, I know many more women, perhaps you, have been exploited by others starting even as young girls and continuing throughout their lives. And if it hasn't happened personally, you certainly know women who have been exploited for their bodies, just like Bathsheba. My saying, "I'm sorry," is hardly sufficient. The purpose of this sermon is in part to remind us all the exploitation is a fundamental part of the human condition and it is wrong.

We know what happens with Bathsheba. David impregnates her and is told so by Bathsheba. So David tries to cover his sin by bringing her husband Uriah back from the war in the hope that he will sleep with his wife. But Uriah refuses on the grounds that it would not be fair to his brothers-in-arms for him to come home to his wife when the others could not. Uriah was an honorable man.

David was not honorable. He responded by having his general put Uriah in the front line so he would be killed. The truly sickening thing is that Uriah himself carried the message David sent to his generals. Unknown to him, Uriah, who trusted his King, was instead exploited and killed by him.

Once again, the rich exploit the poor. The strong made slaves of the weak. Powerful King David ruined the lives of two innocent people to satisfy his sexual needs — despite the fact that he already had other wives!

So where was God in all this? How could God let his personally-selected King to get away with rape and murder? Hey, From the first chapters of Genesis, where Adam and Eve eat the forbidden and fruit and Cain kills his brother Abel, God makes it clear that God is not Superman, flying around the world stopping evil in its tracks. The ones empowered to stop evil are the very ones equally empowered to create evil. Yes, I'm talking about you and I'm talking about me.

The picture on the screen shows a depiction of the prophet Nathan accusing King David for the death of Uriah. Nathan makes it very clear that God knows all about David's sin and what David did would have terrible consequences. First and foremost, David was told the child he fathered would die. Did God kill the baby? Of course not. In a world where half of all newborns died not long after birth, the death of David and Bathsheba's child is one terrible ending for this tragedy.

But the consequences for David hardly stopped there. David had betrayed everything he stood for. He used his kingly power to exploit the innocent, thus forgetting his own roots as a poor shepherd boy. David forgot everything God did for him: saving him from Goliath, saving him from Saul, making him King, making him victorious in battle. David forgot that all he was or would ever be was due solely to God. David made the mistake of turning himself into God and giving himself the power of life and death over his people. As such, when David, or all powerful people, claims control

of life and death for themselves, the result is exploitation and wherever there is exploitation in the world, at whatever level, there will be consequences.

In the case of David, after Bathsheba and Uriah, his kingdom fell into chaos. Everyone in Israel learned that David was not their friend, not their champion, but someone who could abuse them at will. For the rest of his life, David and the nation were plagued with civil wars. David's own sons rebelled again him. Various tribes in Israel wouldn't follow David. David's children killed each other. David was eventually succeeded by his son Solomon, also born of Bathsheba. But Solomon turned out to be an even bigger tyrant and exploiter than David. Solomon was so brutal that when he died, most of the kingdom broke off. Exploitation always has consequences.

We are suffering through an incredible period of hot weather. The western part of our nation is on fire. We can see the smoke here, 3000 miles away. There are huge floods in some parts of the world and droughts elsewhere. Yes, doubters, climate change is real and we play a role in it. Our exploitation of our planet has consequences and we are all suffering.

Our nation is splitting into pieces because some are exploiting the ignorance, hatred, and fears of some to spread false information on all kinds of things, not just Covid. Do you think the persons and news networks speaking this nonsense this are sincere? Of course not. They are making tons of money to tell lies some people want to hear.

So where are we today? Where is the Church of Jesus Christ in the morass of exploitation and corruption and lies and death? Our task is unchanged from the days Our Lord walked the Earth. We have one mission and only one mission: to testify to the truth.

Yes, this congregation is few, just like most congregations. Yes, there are even fewer churches that have a grip on truth and reality untainted by politics and their own history of abusive, exploitative behavior. Nonetheless, we have a voice, a small quiet voice. Never doubt that! We have a voice and as quiet as it may seem, Jesus wants us to use that voice. Where we find ourselves exploiting others or our planet, we must work to end it. Where we see the rich and powerful exploiting our fellow human beings, we must call that out. Success will never come in grand, final victories, but with God's help, it will come, little by little. Exploitation on all levels will not stand and as God's church, we cannot stand for it.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.