

Sarah Kretzmann  
June 16, 2013

“You are the man!” the prophet Nathan says to King David.

This phrase is usually said incorrectly...

Nathan is not patting King David on the back.

He is not stroking his majesty’s royal ego.

No, this is not a phrase of praise; it is a phrase of accusation.

*You* are the man, Nathan says to King David, pointing his finger at David.

The subtext here is not *you’re such a stud...* but rather, *shame on you....*

Why? What has King David done to procure such a nasty accusation from the prophet Nathan?

When this story begins, we learn that some man named Uriah has died, leaving behind a widow named Bathsheba. This is normal enough, and

so we are sad for Uriah's death, but glad that his widow would find comfort in the arms of King David...a lucky woman, this Bathsheba, that fate would provide for her in her grieving, innocent state.

But...if we go back and look at the story of David and Bathsheba and Uriah, we find a story that is anything but innocent. In fact, it is a soap opera to end all soap operas. We have a story based on jealousy, sex and murder, and by the time it's all over, King David has broken like 8 out of the 10 Commandments. He would have broken all ten had he taken the Lord's name in vain, which he might have, or had he committed his terrible crime on the Sabbath, which he also may have done.

Anyway, once we know the entire story, we can understand what the prophet Nathan means when he points the accusing finger at King David and says, "*You* are the man." Then we will discover what it means to really be a

man, today, on this Father's Day...and I promise you we will end up in a good place, but after a very uncomfortable ride.

Ok. So David is the little shepherd boy that the prophet Samuel discovers among the sons of Jesse...young David is chosen to be king over Israel and Judah in order to replace Saul, the very first king of a united Israel, who at first did a good job as king, but eventually became disobedient to God, so God commands Samuel to find a replacement king...David is also Saul's son-in-law for a while, which makes things even more complicated, but no more complicated than the family connections in Calamus. When David is chosen as Saul's replacement, this stirs up jealousy in an already mentally ill Saul, and so David's lifelong relationship with Saul is wild and crazy, until Saul eventually kills himself in the heat of battle.

But long before all that, Saul had had a vision early on in his royal reign that David would be his successor, and in his vision, the one who was to take his throne would be a skilled harp player...and so when the young David shows up in Saul's court with a harp, Saul knew that this young one was the man...although at the time, a very young man...so whenever King Saul was attacked by evil spirits and became a raving and possessed lunatic, the only thing that soothed him was the harp music, played by a very young and confused David. So their relationship was complex and bizarre.

Anyway.

David grows up, becomes the next king, a great king, even the best king—he had it all: wealth, power, prestige, good looks, an unstoppable army, he even had God on his side. But the one thing David didn't have was a woman, even though Saul had given him two of his daughters, but David had dumped them because they didn't suit him. So one night, while going

for a midnight breath of fresh air on the roof, King David spots a gorgeous  
Bathsheba, taking a bath on her roof by the light of the moon. David was  
instantly love-struck, he had to have her, at all costs. This is what Leonard  
Cohen croons about in the song, “Alleluia...” with the lyrics,

*Your faith was strong but you needed proof*

*You saw her bathing on the roof*

*Her beauty in the moonlight overthrew you*

So David sends for Bathsheba, and she visits his chamber and stays  
with him all night.

Suffice it to say, they do more than play cards, and Bathsheba ends up  
pregnant. King David then learns that her husband is Uriah, who happens to  
be a soldier in David’s royal army, and a loyal and decorated one, at that. Be

that as it may, David is now obsessed with Bathsheba and yet needs to cover up this pregnancy, so he sends for Uriah, hoping to have his conjugal visit home conceal his role in her becoming pregnant. But, Uriah refuses to accept this leave; rather, he claims his loyalty to David and to the throne and insists he stay at his post, which is where he belongs, as any good and loyal soldier would have done.

And so, as our plot becomes more and more twisted and complex, King David realizes that if Uriah won't play along in his scheme to cover up this accidental pregnancy, Uriah will simply have to go....and so King David plots the murder of this good and loyal soldier Uriah. King David sends orders to have his army retreat during a particular battle, leaving Uriah to fight—and die—all alone, which is what happens. And so Uriah dies alone on the battlefield, leaving a grieving widow at home who needs to be

comforted, and in swoops King David, who brings the widow Bathsheba into his house, and she becomes his wife...

That's the rest of the story...as Paul Harvey would say... and this is where today's first lesson begins....

That's what King David has done in order to take possession of the woman Bathsheba....this is the sticky web that David has spun in order to take what doesn't belong to him...and Nathan accuses him of his treachery, using a parable, which David clearly doesn't understand, and when Nathan asks David to declare a just punishment for the guilty party in the parable, David says, "Clearly, the guilty man in this story must die!" And then, *then*, Nathan turns to King David and says to him, "*You* are this man. David. You are the guilty one. You have done things worse than those in this story. David, *you* are the man, and you deserve to die." But David doesn't die. Instead, he lives to see his sons die. The child in Bathsheba's womb dies.

Later, their son Absalom rebels against David and during battle, one of

David's own generals kills him, and David is destroyed by grief.

For David's sins, the chickens sure come home to roost.

This is the uncomfortable ride I warned you of earlier.

This is the moment where we ask the question, "What does it mean to be a man?" Apropos, on Father's Day, no? King David was a man—he is the quintessential man...he kills a giant Goliath with a single stone...he writes poetry and has them bound into a book and we know them as the book of Psalms...he commands a mighty army with a word...he inspires sculptors and artists for centuries, like Michelangelo, who in 1504 masterfully chisels him out of precious marble...He has everything. He is everything. In one sense, David really, truly is the man.

But he also commits adultery. And he also commits murder. And he also conspires and schemes to get what he wants. And he also comes from a



dysfunctional family. His father-in-law was a raving lunatic. His son is a rebel, who eventually runs away from home. His legacy becomes plagued by violence and bloodshed and deceit. His mind, which so masterfully invents brilliant military maneuvers also concocts shockingly horrible treachery.

David is guilty of most sins of the flesh and sins of the heart...While he has everything, while he seems to be perfect on the outside, he is a mess on the inside...just like the rest of us...while it seems like he has it all pulled together, he in fact, had nothing pulled together, and in the end is just a man trying to make sense of the mess he'd made of his life...yes, David really, truly is the man...a man, just a man like any other man or woman....Imperfect, to the very core of who we are. Broken people with broken stories. But being strong in the eyes of God does not mean being perfect. A strong man is not a perfect man. A strong woman is not a perfect woman.

And yet, if God can love a King steeped in sin and treachery like  
David was, if God can find favor in him despite his lustful eye and his  
bloody hands, then don't you think God can also has the capacity and the  
desire to love you?