

When Life Tumbles In

BROADCAST—November 11

SCRIPTURE—II Samuel 12:1-7

TEXT—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions"—Psalm 51:1.

The telephone rang in a pastor's home at two o'clock in the morning. Sleepy eyed the pastor answered the phone only to be stabbed wide awake by a voice of distress on the other end of the line. "Pastor, I realize that this is an unearthly hour to call. But I must see you at once. May I come over?" "Of course," said the pastor.

Presently the two men sat in the pastor's living room. What had once been a proud, self-confident man was now the picture of despair and misery. And words tumbled upon one another as he poured out a story heard so often by undershepherds of God. It was the age-old story described by James 1:14-15. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Or to put it literally, *"But every man is tempted to do evil, when he is drawn away of his own craving, and baited as fish. Then when craving has conceived, it gives birth to sin: and sin, when it is fully grown, results in the abortion of death."*

These words had been fulfilled literally in the life of this man. What had promised so much had rendered so little. The fire which once burned within him was now reduced to dead ashes. He had reached for what he thought was life, only to discover that in his greedy fingers he clutched the

wages of sin, death. His secret sin which had eaten at his soul like a cancer was no longer a secret. His wife knew, and was broken-hearted.

The morning paper would carry the sordid story in blazing headlines. And then everyone would know. One of the giants in the community had feet of clay, feet which had crumbled, toppling him from a pedestal of public esteem to the dust of disgrace. His children shamed, his wife crushed, his home broken, his life nothing but dead, brittle leaves. What he had spent a lifetime in building, gone, lost, in one moment of reaching for forbidden fruit. Truly, life had tumbled in upon him. Alas, how true, and how often this story has been told and retold.

"Pastor, what can I do?" asked this pitiful, wretched man. In reply the pastor reached for his Bible, and read a similar experience of David. From II Samuel 11-12 he read of David's great sins of adultery and murder, and of the charges against him by the prophet, Nathan. From Psalm 51 he read David's heart-rendering confession and plea for forgiveness. From Psalm 32 he read of the calm which pervaded David's soul after he had received God's forgiveness for his sins.

The pastor led the man through the same experience. The dawn of a new day was just breaking as he departed to begin, with God's help, to put the

broken pieces of his life together again.

From the depths of despair David cried, "*Have mercy upon me, O God . . . blot out my transgressions*" (Ps. 51:1). As we consider this pitiful picture let us note, first the cause; second, the condition; third, the cure.

First, consider the cause. We find it recorded in II Samuel 11-12.

David committed adultery with Bathsheba. In seeking to cover up this sin he compounded it by devising the death of her husband, Uriah. Thus he became an adulterer and a murderer. It is unthinkable that such a man could be guilty of such. But here is the story in stark reality. How are the mighty fallen! And why?

It was the terrible fruit of idleness and ease. With his army in the field "*David tarried still in Jerusalem . . . and . . . he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon*" (II Sam. 11:1-2).

This picture has been reproduced times without number. The most perilous time morally for a man, or a woman, is called "the dangerous forties," or it may be the "fifties" or "sixties." The story is ever the same: success in one's business or profession, wealth, ease, idleness, and boredom with life. Forbidden fruit dazzled before their eyes, and they fall. Charles Haddon Spurgeon reminds us that "some temptations come to the industrious, but all temptations attack the idle." If adversity has slain its thousands, prosperity has slain its tens of thousands.

Again, David fell victim to custom. "*And David sent messengers, and took her . . .*" (v.4). Did not other oriental despots do the same? So why not David? So reasoned Judah's king. But he was to learn that the rule of "everybody's doing it" is a poor excuse for sin. It is less than no excuse

for one who claims to serve a holy God.

Too many of our social standards are set by Hollywood rather than by the church. How many alcoholics could be traced to a social drink because "everybody's doing it!" How many fallen girls and boys began with undue petting liberties, because "they all do it!" How much dishonesty to make an extra dollar just to "keep up with the Jones!" What sinful practices come just to hold one's job or to get ahead! How many Christians compromise their convictions because of the pagan customs of the social set in which they move! To be accepted is the goal which drives us like herded cattle into sin. Tragic! So terribly tragic! Yet, so true!

Furthermore, David thought that he could cover up his sin. "*Send me Uriah the Hittite*" (v.6). "One night at home for Uriah and my sin will be hidden," thought David. But his devilish scheme did not work. So Uriah must die. When word came that Uriah was dead, David married Bathsheba. Now no one will ever know, or, if they do, who will accuse? But God knew, and He did not excuse.

"*Be sure your sin will find you out,*" says God (Num. 32:23). There is no such thing as a perfect crime, we are told. Did you ever notice how many major crimes are solved by some minor clue? There is a moral principle in the universe which will not be denied.

I learned this truth early in life. One day my mother gave me a bucket of seed corn to plant. Instead I dug a hole in the ground, poured the corn in, and covered it up. My sin was hidden. But one day the evidence of it came to light as hundreds of little blades of corn pushed their accusing heads to the surface. My mother discovered it, and—well, I will let you imagine the rest. Before I ever knew that it was in the Bible I learned

painfully that "whatsoever a [boy] soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 12:7).

Yes, David sinned, and it brought his house crashing down upon him. And, alas, there have been many Davids and many crashes.

Second, note the condition. Once again we hear David's cry, "*Have mercy upon me, O God . . . and blot out my transgressions.*" The fifty-first psalm is the record of David's experience after God's prophet had pointed the accusing finger at him saying, "*Thou art the man*" (II Sam. 12:7).

"*Have mercy upon me, O God . . .*" This is the cry of a soul in despair. A heart which once had beaten as one with God's heart is broken (cf. I Kings 11:4; Acts 13:22). The sweet singer of Israel is convulsed with sobs. The light has all but been extinguished for one who has burned so brilliantly in the firmament of God's good pleasure. For David, life truly had tumbled in. He has not lost his salvation, his hold upon God or God's hold upon him. Indeed it is the sense of the presence of God in his life that makes him so conscious of his sin. He is God's child suffering because of what his sin has done to God.

Sin offers so much but gives so little. It tantalizes but never satisfies. A man reliving his past said, "My greatest punishment is the thought of what I am." David's punishment was even greater. Not only what he was, but what he had been and could have become rose up like a spectre in the night to haunt him.

Near the end of a misspent life Lord Byron wrote:

My days are in the yellow leaf;

The fruits and flowers of love are gone;

The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

But David lost something that Byron never had. A sense of unmarred fellowship with God, a character well-pleasing to God, the joy that comes only to one who orders his life after the will of God. It is bad enough when sin mars the life of any man. But it is tragedy unspeakable when Satan numbers among his trophies the life of one who once counted so much for God. For this tragedy is compounded in the lives of others.

A fallen preacher casts a shadow over every other preacher, a deacon whose life denies his profession is the shame of every other deacon. Choir members, Sunday School teachers, yea, any Christian whose life rots and falls because of sins, secret or otherwise, ridicules the Gospel, the church, even Christ Himself. And if you are such a person, and are not the most miserable person you know, you would do well to ask, "Am I a child of God at all?"

But enough of the negative. When life tumbles in is there any hope? There is, and that is the very heart of the gospel. There is hope for you who have never known Christ as your Saviour. And, blessed be God, there is hope for the Christian whose life is besmirched by sin.

Third, consider the cure. Hear once again David's cry, "*Have mercy upon me, O God . . . blot out my transgressions.*"

When David realized his terrible sins what did he do? He did not commit suicide. He did not harden the heart and plunge deeper into sin. Nor did he seek to justify his sin by blaming Bathsheba, Uriah, or social custom. He bared his soul before God in confession and a plea for mercy and forgiveness.

It is so difficult for the human heart to say "I have sinned." Instead we say, "I made a mistake," or "My unhappy home made me do it," or "I was

the victim of an unfortunate sociological environment," or "I suffer from glandular disturbance," or "Well, you know how it is. It was just one of those things that could happen to anyone."

David did none of these things. He made a clean breast of it all. "*I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me*" (Ps. 51:3). He hated sin not for what it had done to him but to God. "*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight*" (v.4). He had sinned against others, yes, but greatest of all he had sinned against God.

That David did not seek to minimize his condition may be seen in the words which he used. "Transgression" is "rebellion;" "iniquity" is "crookedness;" "sin" means "to miss the mark." "Blot" means to erase the last line of his ugly record. "Wash" signifies painful scrubbing. And "cleanse" means to be pronounced acceptable before God in worship and service.

Said David, "*I have rebelled against your will, I am crooked and twisted, I have missed the goal of your will for my life. O God, erase the last line of my ugly record, scrub me of my crookedness, cleanse me of my failure to live up to your will or my life.*" Seeing the filth in his heart he cries out again, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation . . .*" (vv.10-12).

Only God can do this. Only mercy can avail for David. "*For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*" (vv. 16-17).

Oh beloved friend, let David's confession be yours. Immediately after this broadcast turn to Psalm 51. Read it with your soul as well as with your mind. Feel the agony of it. Let it become your agony. Lay your soul bare before God. Cast yourself upon His mercy. Make this sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart.

Then turn to Psalm 32 which describes David's condition after this confession. Feel the confidence and quietness of it as he says, "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered . . . when I kept silence my bones waxed old . . . for night and day thy hand was heavy upon me . . . I acknowledged my sin unto thee . . . and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin*" (vv. 1-5).

Oh, dear Christian friend, we are so weak, so prone to sin. But hear the word of God. "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (I John 1:9). "*Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee*" (Ps. 51:13).

Life may tumble in on you. But, thank God, there is One who can make it right again, not through your merit, but by His grace.

When Marilyn Monroe was found dead her hand was grasping the telephone as though she were trying to call for help. Someone dramatically remarked, "She was calling for help, but there was no one on the other end of the line." Not so, for those who call on God in repentance and faith. For His promise ever is "*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*" (Isa. 55:6-7).