



PROBLEMS CHRISTIANS HAVE

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'PROBLEMS CHRISTIANS HAVE

Thus -saysthe Lord, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house..."

II Samuel 12:11

In much of what one hears about Christianity these days, the impression is often given that the course of one's Christian experience is very smooth indeed! I wonder if this is really true. I wonder if perhaps Christians have far greater problems than those who live outside of Christ.

I know, it must be exceedingly bleak to live outside of Christ, and those of you who are in that situation undoubtedly know this very well. And from a certain point of view, Christian people have great peace as a part of their living relationship with Christ. I wouldn't trade being a Christian for anything else in the world. But I still think that Christians have very large problems. I think for their own good they should face them. I want to speak about them now so that in case you are considering the Christian faith, you will not think of it as problem free. Otherwise, you might start trying to be a Christian, you would discover the problems later, and then you would retreat back into your old way of life. And your second state would be worse than your first.

Now, when I say that Christians have problems, I do not simply mean that they continue to have the same problems that people have. They do have the same problems, to a certain extent. They get sick. They become depressed. They have trouble looking ends meet. Surely they do. But I am thinking now about the special problems that Christians have to deal with because they are Christians. And I am thinking especially about the problems that are theirs because they believe in the Bible.

Being a Christian, you see, means that a person recognizes that the Bible is the Word of God. Because God is its author, it comes into our lives with special authority. But when a person reads the Bible, he enters a different world, and there are parts of that world that are very shocking, terrifying, and extremely perplexing. No, it's true that there are many parts of the Bible that are inspiring, and there are parts that are comforting. But there are other parts that are... read the next paragraph and you will see what I mean.

This is from II Samuel 12 in the Old Testament, part of the Bible, and it is the record of the sin of David with Bathsheba. Everyone who doesn't know the Bible very well knows that David committed adultery with Bathsheba. There are movies about this, as we might expect. In case, II Samuel 12 is the record of the visit of the prophet to David, and this visit caused David to admit his sin. Notice how God indicated He was going to punish David for what he had done. II Samuel 12: 11: "And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him 'There were two men in a certain city, the one (rich) the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but a little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and his children; it used to eat of his morsel, and lie from his cup, and lie in his bosom. And now there came a traveler to him, and he was unwilling to take of his own flock to prepare for the traveler who had come to him, but he took the poor lamb, and prepared it for the man who had come to him.' Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold,

because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

"Nathan said to David, 'You are the man. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if this were too little I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife [Bathsheba] to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me"... Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die. Then Nathan went to his house.'

Now, there are some exasperating problems in this material. If you are a Christian, you should be willing to face them. If you are not a Christian, you might just as well know about these problems, so that you will be properly advised when it comes to considering the Christian faith. There are elements of II Samuel 12: 1-15 that make us raise questions about God about the way He handles His world. I want to underscore one of them. See what you think of it.

Even though God gave David's sin, God also

said to him that He would bring evil upon him, and He would take his wives and give them to David's neighbor. This is what we read: "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.'" The event which God described was despicable. David had killed one of his captains and taken that captain's wife and God punished David by means of an evil event. There would come a time, said the Lord, that David's wives would be violated publicly.

This actually happened, and not very long after word. In II Samuel 16 there is the record of how David's son Absalom led a rebellion against his father, and as part of that rebellion he claimed David's concubines as his own. The Bible says: "'They pitched a tent for Absalom upon the roof; and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (v. 22).

All this, I believe, raises some enormous problems for people who take the Bible seriously. Surely, Absalom's violating of David's concubines and concubines were actually wives was a loathsome act. To take a step back, the fact that David even had more than one wife, raises serious questions. But given the fact that he did, the public disgracing of these women and of David himself is a very low point in the human story. But the most perplexing thing of all is that the word that came from the Lord indicated that God somehow controlled this event and designed it as punishment for David.

The great question that remains after all our consternation has passed is this: Is God really as holy as He says He is? One who takes the whole Bible seriously and who thus believes that

God actually spoke through Nathan the prophet to David in the words that are recorded in II Samuel 12 must face this problem. Is there a solution?

There are a couple of things that should be said, I think, that can begin to put to rest the grave doubts about God's holiness that are raised by this episode. In the first place, we must say that God's arranging to punish David's sin, even though David confessed it and even though God assured him that he was forgiven, emphasizes the ruinous character of sin. We have become habituated to sin. As workers in a factory where the noise level is terrifically high finally become so accustomed to the noise they don't hear it anymore, we have become so accustomed to sin, we hardly notice it anymore. What we have just read indicates that sin is, however, utterly devastating and corrupting, and once it starts rolling through human society no man can stop it from working out its dire consequences. And Absalom's rebellion and his perverse, incestuous action were a natural outgrowth of this sinful direction which David himself had set in motion.

So that must be said, and it helps a little. Sin is far, far worse than you and I are capable of imagining. And this must be said: When we observe that God told David that He was going to cause David the public embarrassment that resulted from Absalom's disgraceful deed, we see the mystery of the relationship between God, man, and Satan. God is all powerful, infinitely wise. He is the creator of all, and the controller of history. But man is great, too: God made man great. God created man in His own image. God gave man the capacity for thought, for decision, for action. The Bible reveals the greatness of God, and it also reveals the greatness of man.

The greatness of man is taught in the Bible by the fact that God judges man. Man's actions are

so important that the Bible says: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (II Corinthians 5: 10). What we do in the body is that important. And David was a responsible man. So was Absalom who later violated David's concubines. And all the people who helped Absalom plan his rebellion against David and incited him to perform his contemptible deed—they were responsible people, too. And when you read the chapters between II Samuel 12 and 16, you see that there were many human passions, ambitions, and decisions that actually caused Absalom's odious conduct.

And Satan had a role in all this, too. He was the great mastermind behind all the evil. The Old Testament depicts him as the great tempter. Satan was involved in Absalom's revolution against his father, the lord's anointed. And Absalom's willingness to heed the advice of his evil aides and violate his father's concubines rose out of his evil nature that had been rendered more and more evil by his repeated surrenders to Satan's suggestions.

Thus, the material in II Samuel 12 alerts us to the mysterious quality of human history which involves the action of man, the action of Satan, and the over-arching, all-controlling action of God. Some times we can be very quick to assign causes when we discuss events. We may say of something evil, "Oh, that is Satan's action!" may be, but Satan is not a loner. He uses men, and men use him. And God never surrenders His control of the world, either.

So the material in II Samuel 12 humbles us and shows us how little we know about the course of events in our world. And this is worth thinking about. But it doesn't solve our problem completely. The fact remains that II Samuel 12 brings Almighty

God very, very close to the evil in this world, and we are frightened by what we see.

Where does the final solution lie?

For the final solution, we must turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who finally quiets our fright, stills our unrest, and overcomes our doubts by furnishing us the fulness of God's revelation. We must not forget that II Samuel 12 is not the final revelation of God. Jesus is God's final revelation. John's Gospel opens with these words: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (1:18). Everything we know about God must be seen in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must take the entire Bible utterly seriously, but when we do, there are times when dark clouds come rolling over our faith and we recoil in horror at what we see. But when we focus our attention upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the clouds part again, and the sunlight of God's full revelation becomes clear once more.

Jesus Christ is the final revelation of God. Every thing the rest of the Bible tells us about God must be reviewed in terms of what we know about Jesus Christ. Our ultimate conclusions concerning God cannot be made on the basis of what is found in the Old Testament. Our ultimate conclusions must be made in terms of the person who came to reveal God so completely that, if we know Him, if we believe in Him, we may be sure that we know God and that our faith is rooted in God.

Once, while Jesus was conducting His earthly work, one of His followers tried to get to the God behind Jesus Christ. He had been with Jesus several months, and he was impressed with Jesus' power. But he wanted to see the God behind Jesus. John 14 records Jesus' conversation with him this way: "Philip said to (Jesus), 'Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.'" Jesus said to him, 'Have

I been with you so long and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, "Show us the Father?" you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his work. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves" (14:9-11).

You see, Jesus reveals God in His words and works. And this is important in connection with the problem that has been troubling us. If you will recall, we examined the message of Nathan the prophet to David after David sinned, and we were shocked to find there that God indicated that He was going to use a very sinful event as a punishment for David. With this, the question rose, "Is God as seriously opposed to sin as we have been led to believe?" That is a grievous problem, as you recognize at once.

Well, now we have seen that the God who is found in the Old Testament is revealed fully in the person of Jesus Christ, and when we see Jesus, we see that God's holy abhorrence of sin is so actual, that rather than leave sin unpunished, He punished it by pouring out His wrath upon the Son of His love. When we see Jesus, we learn beyond a shadow of doubt that God is love. He loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son on the tree of the cross so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Corinthians 5:19).

As we live, we are confronted by mystery. And when we read the Bible, new mysteries are encountered and old mysteries deepen. That there are mysteries that defy human reason, no one can deny. But when one lives with the whole Bible and with the final revelation of God that has appeared in

Jesus Christ, every other mystery poles into in significance in the presence of the cross. There is no explaining the cross. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, suffered, bled, and died there for the sins of His people. On Calvary, where the cross was planted, God, through some astonishing act of divine accomplishment, satisfied both His justice and His mercy in His brilliant act of self sacrifice.

We come away from it all with the conviction that, whatever evidences there may be to the contrary, God remains uncontaminated by sin, even though His own involvement both with man and with demon seems to us sometimes to bring Him into that situation. The God with whom we have to do so detests human sinfulness that He determined to punish it in the ultimate fashion, by using His own dear Son as the sin bearer. From out of sin's gruesome ugliness and the terror of God's own judgment against it, there arises the beauty of the love of God.

You can be saved from perishing if you believe in this love-if you abandon yourself to the mercy of God and plead with Him to apply to your life all the goodness that Jesus earned when He died. You must confess that you, no less than David of old, are deeply involved in the corruption of sin, and you must confess that God alone through Christ can save you. And when you do that, the doubts and the problems and the questions you have will not disappear entirely, but they will be overcome by the glorious reality of God's salvation through Jesus.

Why have I gone into all this? Well, what we have been talking about is basically the problem of evil, the deepest problem of all. Though we cannot solve it, though there are things in the Bible that will forever leave us puzzled, we do know that evil has been overcome by God Himself through

the transcendently important and infinitely worthwhile work of Jesus accomplished on the cross.

And so you see, Christianity is still a very important place to be. If you are outside this faith, I invite you to come inside with us. If you do, you will still have problems-you'll probably have some that you never thought of before. But you will have Jesus, too. Once a person knows God through Jesus Christ His Son, his problems become secondary when compared to the solutions God provides, solutions that are more than our poor minds can grasp.

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