



*Sunday, May 7th*

2 Samuel 12:1-13

## Civil Speech

The case of Nathan the prophet confronting his King with a carefully scripted parable delivered by God as a message to convict King David of his sin is a remarkable example in the Scripture of what the New Testament will later describe as “speaking the truth in love.” By telling the story of a rich ruler who asks his lowly servant to serve up his pet lamb for out-of-town guest popping in for a visit, Nathan allows David to see that HE was, in fact, doing the very same thing by taking Bathsheba into his bed and killing her faithful husband, Uriah. It is both painful and inspiring because we see in this public exchange between leaders, both the Truth of one’s wrongs and the love and mercy of God in bringing his chosen Son, King David, to a place of repentance. And, though there were severe consequences to David’s sin, God did restore him, proven to us by David’s writing of the 51st Psalm.

## Lessons from Nathan’s Encounter with David

Nathan’s words, “You are the man!,” are delivered with perfect timing. Before he can say these words, however, he must first soften David’s heart. A poignant story allows David to empathize with those he has treated as objects. It is a brilliant example of saying the right things at the right time to the right person using the right words. And, it teaches us that before we can speak well of others we must think well of others. Further, it also teaches us that before we speak to others we must seek to understand others, not as objects or obstacles but as fellows citizens made in the image of God.

## I. Objectification

It becomes possible for us to sin against others when we objectify them. Keeping the last five commandments, do not lie, steal, kill, commit adultery, or covet, help us to love others as people, just like us. Only when we devalue others by making them object-like, is it possible for us to live with ourselves when we lie, steal, and kill, etc.

King David lost touch with the humanity of others. It started when he failed to go off to war with his comrades. The bible says, "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." (2 Samuel 11:1). He then looked out from his penthouse where he saw Bathsheba bathing on her roof. Verse 4 says that he sent messengers and "took" her (Hebrew word *laqach*). Being married to Uriah, she was not his to take, even if he was king. After impregnating her, he attempted to cover up his sin by taking Uriah's life. By making Bathsheba an object of lust and Uriah an object of inconvenience (Uriah was in his way), David was able to justify his sin.

The problem with objectifying others, beside the damage it does to them, is that it causes us to lose touch with our own humanity. When Nathan approaches David, he is out of touch with being God's chosen one (a man after God's own heart), his kingship, and his role as father, husband, and friend.

A core aspect of being able to be civil is to treat others as persons not objects. David fails.

## II. Empathy

David is a powerful king who has lost touch with his humanity. We can be fairly certain that if Nathan the prophet came to David and confronted him with his sin by rightly accusing him of the wrong he committed, he could have been in danger of losing his own life; once we start objectifying others, it is hard to stop.

God gives Nathan a Word for David that is a powerful antidote for his sickness of making others into objects instead of treating them as persons. He tells Nathan to deliver a parable that will allow David to place himself in the shoes of others. Empathy can be defined as an ability to understand and share another person's emotions and condition in life.

When Nathan says in verse 7, "You are the man!," he can do so because he has successfully gotten David to empathize with those whom he has made into objects.

Before we can speak words of challenge to others, we MUST be able to feel and understand their own condition in life as friends, colleagues, family members, etc. And, they must be able to understand and feel our condition. Being able to empathize with others is a key component of being civil (one who can show kindness to both friend and enemy) and should help us form the words we use to both challenge and comfort one another.

## III. Accompaniment

Nathan was a prophet of God. His job was to listen to the Word of God and then to deliver it to the people of God. He could have just clobbered David over the head with the Truth. He knew the Truth. God told him what David did. He knew David's secret sin. Instead, he allowed David to regain his humanity through a story that allowed David to empathize with the plight of those who lack power and control.

What might happen if we were to listen deeply to others so we understood and shared how they felt and what they experienced in life as fellow citizens rather than volleying ideas back and forth in attempts to get others to listen to us?

In this story, Nathan is able to speak to David both as an arrogant King and as a broken father who ends up losing his son because of his sin. He says many words to David because David regains his ability to see others as persons instead of objects.

## Living God, Friend of Man

The Gospel of Jesus Christ can be compared to the parable Nathan shares with David- It awakens us to our sin and revives our humanity. When we see Jesus dying upon the cross, the finger of God points not to us but to His son. We see the profound love of God sacrificing his son so that we might simultaneously know the profoundness of our sin and the greatness of his love. Jesus says you are not an object of wrath but my friend for whom I die. And, our hearts are stirred and spurred on to offer love to others.

## Applying Civil Speech to Our Lives

1. Is there a group of people that you would describe as “those people?” Blacks, Syrians, Gays, Republican, Democrats, Catholics, Progressives, Conservatives, Home Schoolers, Public School Kids, Rednecks, Homeless, The Rich, Corporate People, etc.

If so, how might you go about understanding one person from this group in a way that would allow you to call them a friend?

2. Who have you gossiped about, or lied to, or coveted, or lusted after, or hated a person in the past month?

The group that this person represents may be a group that you objectify.

Consider praying regular prayers of blessing over this person. Be sure to confess this sin to God if it is a hidden sin. If the person you have sinned against knows that you have harmed them, make amends.

3. As a way to strengthen your ability to engage in civil speech, commit to having a conversation with someone who does not agree with your views with the intention of understanding them as a person rather than as a means of getting them to change their minds about their beliefs.

4. Who might you accompany this month?