

We Need A Greater High Priest

2 Samuel 12:1-13

Ash Wednesday

Feb. 14, 2018

Pastor Hanneman

Today is Valentine's Day, the day of love. On this day couples traditionally take the time to demonstrate the love they have for one another in a special way. It is a love that is given and received by each individual.

If one individual is more prepared for this occasion than the other, then this day isn't as special as it could be. When love isn't returned it can make the one, showing the effort, feel that their gifts, food, or love, isn't really appreciated because their loved one didn't put in the same effort to show their love. It may seem odd to us that Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday have fallen on the same day. We might think that the themes of these days are very much different. However, I don't think that to be true. I believe that talking about love is what Ash Wednesday is all about. It is the love of our God who saved us from our sins, is what makes Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent so important for us.

Often, we don't return our God's love for us equally. He gives us so much to show us how important we are, but we often return that love with sin. How does our God respond? Not as he should or how we might expect. He returns our sin with even more love. We see a prime example of this in the life of David. David returned all of God's blessings by committing some rather despicable sins, but the Lord didn't condemn him, he forgave him.

That our God is a forgiving God is a truth that we never want to forget because we need our God to be that forgiving. During Lent this year we will focus on how Jesus served as our Great High Priest. As we take a look at David's life and our lives we will see that we don't need just any high priest but a high priest that is greater than all the rest.

What was the job of the High Priest? When God set out the worship regulations for the people of Israel he established the priesthood. The priests were to assist with the worship of the people. They were the ones who were to perform the sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. They were also the ones who offered up prayers to God on behalf of the people. The High Priest had the special job of being able to go behind the curtain of the Most Holy Place where God's presence resided and stand before God as the people's representative pleading for God to forgive them all.

God wanted to teach the people that they needed someone to mediate between God and them and that a sacrifice of an innocent was to be made to secure the forgiveness of sins. This would have been something that every Israelite would have known, especially King David.

God said that David was a man after God's own heart. That means he loved the word of God and followed it every day. When you look at the life of David you see that quite clearly. He honored his God's will all the time and lived his life for God no matter what was happening to him. David is a great example on how to follow God when times are tough. As a result, the Lord blessed him greatly.

God made him King, gave him wives, gave him victory everywhere he went. He gave him fame and riches and children. David had all that he could possibly ask for and then some from God. David had it all. As far as God's relationship with David went God really showed his love to David in many ways. He gave him some of the best presents ever. But, how did David repay him? David was good, but he was a sinner who was capable of falling, and fall he did.

Even though he was blessed greatly, David wasn't content. He wanted more. He saw another man's wife and he took her as his own. When he found out that his union with her was going to result in the birth of a child, David tried to cover it up. He called her husband, Uriah, in hoping that he would go home and be with his wife so that it would appear that the child was his. But, that didn't work. David even tried to get him drunk, so he would unknowingly go home but still Uriah stayed with David. Finally, David gave Uriah a note to give to his commanding officer Joab. The note said that Uriah was to be put in the front lines and left to die in battle. Joab obeyed the order and Uriah was murdered at David's command. David then took Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, as his own and claimed the child for himself.

David needed to repent. He needed to have a sacrifice made for his sins. David, however, didn't go to the priest for forgiveness. He kept it within himself, hoping that it would go away. In the lesson we hear how God called him back through the prophet Nathan. Nathan came one year after David committed his sins. A whole year without repenting! David had truly fallen from grace. The man after God's own heart was no more. He returned God's love with rejection.

Some would think that Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day don't really go together because on Ash Wednesday we are reminded of the great need for us to repent. Valentine's Day isn't about saying, "I'm sorry," but by saying, "I love you." In that case they would be right. Recognizing our need to repent isn't so wonderful and joyful for us to think about.

We could easily "look down" on David for everything he did, but we know too well that we are guilty of our sins and sometimes we too fail to repent. We don't always want to admit that we did wrong. We try to cover up our sins hoping that they will go away like David or even like Ananias and Saphira did in the early church. We also attempt to hide our sins by emphasizing our greatness and righteousness. Oh, how righteous did David look when he took the mourning and pregnant wife of Uriah into his home to care for her and her child. He must have looked like a hero, just like the Pharisee tried to do in Jesus' parable. But, how foolish of us to think that we can lie to our God. We can't hide our sins behind any amount of righteousness, can we? No amount of good can make up for any sin. Each sin needs to be repented of because each sin deserves hell. We are only kidding ourselves if we think that we can get away with our sins that we will not have to answer for them one day.

And that is why we need God to forgive us. He is the one we will answer to one day. He is the judge and he is the jury and he is the executioner who will send us to hell. He is also the pardoner who forgives our sins, just like he did for David. This is why Valentine's Day is a fitting day to share Ash Wednesday with. It is all about God's love for sinners. Look at the love of God in this lesson.

David sinned, and he wasn't going to his God for help. He wasn't recognizing his sinfulness nor his fall from grace. David didn't realize that he was walking down the road to hell instead of on the road to heaven. He needed to be saved. So, God went to him. He sent the prophet Nathan to call him back. Nathan did it with a rather unique and powerful story which riled up David enough to condemn himself. That was what David needed to realize that what he did wasn't right. He confessed, and God forgave unconditionally.

The Hebrew expresses God's act of forgiveness in an interesting way. Nathan says, "***The Lord has passed over or left behind your sin, you will not die.***" Death and hell was the fair judgment for the murderer David, but God left his sins behind. The Lord no longer carried David's sin to use against him. It was as if David never sinned in the first place in God's eyes. Nothing but love for David could have caused the Lord to act with such grace. What an amazing gift of love David received despite what he did against his God and his fellow people.

Only God can give us forgiveness like this. The priests of David's day weren't enough. The animals that were sacrificed couldn't really take away the people's sins. That is why a sacrifice had to be made all the time for the sins that were committed. That is why the priests had to keep praying on behalf of the people. There needed to be a sacrifice that would once and for all take away the sins of the world. There needed to be someone who could stand before God and plead our case for all our sins at once.

We needed God to be our High Priest. And he was. David could know that his sins were forgiven because his God was going to permanently take away all of sins with one sacrificial act on the world's behalf. He was going to give us a Great High Priest who would be the greatest of them all. He was going to give us the one who can take away sins so that they all can be left behind, and that is Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus Christ we are forgiven of all our sins. Because of Jesus Christ we have the love of God on our side. Because of Jesus Christ we too will not die because our God has left behind all our sins so that when we meet him on the last day we will not have to answer for any of them.

God's forgiveness is his loving gift to you. How do we return that love? Repent! Don't think you can hide your sins, because you can't. Don't hide them but confess them. Don't try and think anything you do can make up for them, they can't. Instead, know that your God's work of salvation which we will review again this Lenten season did. There is forgiveness and it is found in our God's love for us sinners.

Ash Wednesday is all about repentance, but it is also all about love. When we repent we see God's love for us in that he forgives all our sins. So, how fitting it is that Valentine's Day is today as well. For no greater gift of love was given than the gift of Jesus' priestly work on the cross so that sinners like David, like me, and like you, could have every sin left behind with heaven still before us. Amen.