

“What can I give the Bum?”

“The Parable Of The Poor Man’s Ewe Lamb”



“And Nathan said to David, “Thou art the man.”
2 Samuel 12:7

This is probably the best known of the Old Testament parables. The lead up to the parable told by Nathan and the parable itself are basically confined to 2 Samuel in chapters 11 and 12.

The parable is about a poor man who had only one small lamb that he had raised like it was one of his children. It drank and ate with him, stayed with him and comforted him. Another man in the city was very rich and had many sheep. A traveler came by one day and asked for some food. Instead of taking one of his many sheep, the rich man took the poor man’s lamb, killed it and served it to the stranger.

I am reminded of when I was a kid and men who we referred to as “bums” would come to the back door and ask for food. My Mother always gave them a sandwich and usually a cup of coffee and a piece of pie. There was always pie in the refrigerator for my Father, and Mom always had the coffee pot on. She would not have thought of sending them away hungry. But that was a different era. Many times she would invite them to sit at the kitchen table while they ate. I wouldn’t think of doing that today. This parable tells how the rich man took from the poor man to feed the traveler.

This story told by Nathan, a prophet who served both David and his son Solomon as a steadfast servant of God, is contained in just four verses. Although Nathan had some wonderful assignments, he also had some that we wouldn’t want to have to do.

The story is not just about a lamb. This lamb was a personal pet to the poor man and he treated it as family. The story upsets us that anyone would take the one lamb the poor man had when the rich man had so many. We immediately have sympathy for the poor man.

David had seen a beautiful woman whom he wanted as his own. But she was already married to one of his best soldiers, Uriah. When David learned that Bathsheba was pregnant with his child, he told his soldiers to put Uriah in the heat of the battle and make sure he was killed. David schemed to put him on leave so Uriah would be seen as the father of the child. Uriah was a faithful soldier and he obeyed the command of his service. But David was King and he was determined to get what he wanted. After Uriah had died in battle, David was free to take Bathsheba as his wife.

Nathan is sent to tell David of his sin. It wouldn’t have been an easy assignment. He was a devoted prophet to God and a counsellor to David. When Nathan told David the story about the poor man’s lamb, David was angry and said “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.” 2 Samuel 12:5.

Nathan had set the trap for David to condemn himself. Nathan replies “Thou art the man.” Then Nathan goes on to tell David how he had received so much from God, and how he had killed Uriah for his own pleasure. David had responded by not being satisfied. His self-desire had taken control of his life. Nathan had to tell him the consequences of his wrongdoing.

God’s message to David through this short story can help us judge our own actions. We sometimes are able to see our own wrongdoings. Sometimes we are fortunate enough to have a good friend hint that we should re-think something we are doing. We can often lie to ourselves so that we can see things the way we want to see them rather than the way God wants us to see them. The truth can be painful, but it is necessary even if we learn the hard way.

All of us are selfish at times. The Lord knows our nature. He knows our humanness, but we are also given a way to find our way through these temptations. Nathan doesn’t accuse David. He simply presented a story and allowed David to judge himself. The Lord has provided us a story called the Bible. If we read it, we know what is right. But we are so human. Yet, we can keep our sins from other humans and even convince ourselves they are o.k., but we can’t hide them from God. David, although a good king and a good servant in many ways, could not hide from God. Neither can we. That can be scary at times, and comforting at other times.

This little story presents another problem to us. If we have a friend who is headed for trouble, should we get involved? We may want to help our friend. But, maybe that friend will think it is none of our business. Maybe it will be the end of a wonderful friendship. It could be the beginning of a wonderful new confidence from the friend because someone really cared enough to get involved. Nathan didn’t think he had a choice. A lot may depend on the way we approach the friend. Nathan did it through a story. Nathan did not accuse David or threaten him. He simply told him a story and allowed David to see the consequences of his actions. God has given us His word. He does not condemn us. The choice is ours.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we know You care for us just as much and more than the poor man cared for his lamb yet we often betray that love. We need led to know when we should speak and when we should be quiet. Help us to do what is right so others may know that You care for them and in so doing show Your love to them through us. Amen

1. Where do we fit into this story?
2. Are we the poor man who has lost everything he valued?
3. Are we the rich man who has more than he needs, but is unwilling to share?
4. Is Christ the sacrificial lamb? For Whom?

The Parable of the Poor man's ewe lamb

And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, 'There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.' And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, 'As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'" 2 Samuel 12:1-6

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