

Dear People of God,

NUTS! Having looked at the previous three women in the genealogy of Jesus and now looking at this fourth one, one word comes to mind: Nuts! Don't get me wrong; I'm not talking about the women. Listen, we use that word in a lot of different ways, don't we?

"Nuts" as in "This is wrong!" Nuts with a frown! Some of these women are promiscuous. It's surprising that God would include these people in his family, let alone the genealogy of Jesus.

Then there's "Nuts" as in "Then there's hope me too." Nuts with a smile! I can't believe God doesn't dismiss people who fall into what we often consider big sin, particularly sexual sins. If he forgives them, then there's hope for me.

Related to that, it can also be "Nuts" as in "This is amazing. He's still willing to use me!" Nuts with a laugh! It's a sign of God's amazing grace that he will work through these four women and the men associated with them. To use an old English phrase, "God can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick." That's nuts!

God is so inclusive and so forgiving and he's so gracious and empowering to use us regardless of our back-story. In fact, our coloured back-story is sometimes the reason he does use us the way he does. In typical God-fashion, he works all things—even the bad ones in our lives—together for our good and his glory. There's plenty of bad to go around in this David and Bathsheba story that we've got under the microscope today. We've studied Tamar, Rahab and Ruth so far. Now we come to Bathsheba with whom King David committed adultery.

### **UnNamed But Not Forsaken**

Turning to Matthew's genealogy for a moment, what information does he include about her? He doesn't say too much about any of the people in this line of Jesus but whatever he does include is purposeful. Intentional. Here's what we read in v.13:

*Mt 1:13 "David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife" (NIV).*

This first thing this can teach us is that Bathsheba might be unnamed but she is not forsaken or forgotten. Like a lot of Bible stories, there isn't a lot of details. So we either have to fill in the gaps with some thorough background research which is always good. But that only goes so far. The better place to start, at least, is to look at the text: what do we have and why is this limited and specific information given? It's not helpful to read into the passage things that might be

speculative. The best course is to dig deep into what we do have and discover why that's given.

Take a look at the genealogy. You immediately see that the emphasis of this part of the family line of Jesus is David. King David. And then King Solomon. After Solomon, we get the little addition "whose mother had been Uriah's wife." From the Old Testament, we know this refers to Bathsheba. But her name isn't even mentioned here in Matthew. Rather her second husband, her son and her murdered ex-husband are named. That's an interesting part of this genealogy.

I like how Author Nell Goddard put it. Let me just quote her because she says it well.

Is there an event in your family history that you never really speak of? Something too shameful, too awkward really to mention?

The presence of 'Uriah's Wife' in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is like bringing this relative's misdemeanours up during a wedding speech, or around the table at Christmas dinner. It's like tweeting it out to your thousands of followers, broadcasting it on Facebook Live, or sharing it on Instagram stories.

David took another man's wife. David abused his power. David committed adultery at a time when adultery was punishable by death. David didn't even address the woman he was sleeping with by name. David was flawed, and David was an ancestor of Jesus.

He comes from a long line of Israelites who are named, but ...Bathsheba isn't named in Jesus' genealogy. I find it difficult that she is known only as 'Uriah's Wife' – that even in her story in 2 Samuel 11, she is referred to not (so much) by name but [more] in relation to the men to whom she is linked: 'Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.'

If I'm honest, I want Bathsheba to have her own identity. I want her to be known for who *she* is, not who she was married to. But in a world of individual identity [like ours] which pressures us to be known and stand out from the crowd, the presence of 'Uriah's Wife' in Jesus' genealogy reminds us of something bigger than our own identities. It reminds us of a God who was not ashamed to be associated with a broken heritage, a God who redeems seemingly irredeemable situations, and who extends grace and mercy and hope where none is normally found.

Through Jesus' genealogy in the book of Matthew,... we see that God is not ashamed of our past. We learn that nothing is beyond redemption – neither what has been done **by** us, nor what has been done to us.

This Christmas, as we read the genealogy of Emmanuel, God with us, may we draw close to the God who is unashamed of our past and working all things together for the good of our future.

(<https://licc.org.uk/resources/uriah-s-wife-holy-irregularities-4-4/>)

Such is the grace of God to us, dear people, whether we are named or not, whether we feel neglected, passed over, unworthy or not. God always knows our name. He knows our heart. And he redeems and uses the brokenness of our lives to further his purposes in us and through us for his kingdom. No matter our name or history, God's grace to us ensures we are never forsaken by God.

Jesus came to be forsaken in our place. Because God would not forsake the fallen world but set out to save it, he sent his Son to us. Jesus reconciles the world to God, starting with his incarnation. He came to be one of us, a human. He took upon himself the burdens of sin inflicted upon us like it was for Bathsheba, our shame and hurt. He takes our sins of commission upon himself—vile and selfish—even the sin of men like David. He ensures the whole line of his ancestors recorded by Matthew can find a place at God's table by God's grace. Those needing the grace of forgiveness and the grace of healing mercy. He came for our unknown pain and hidden sins. He came for the unnamed. He was forsaken so that we might never be forsaken by God. That's such good news for all of us when we're feeling unnamed. It's nuts!

### **Named But Needing Redemption**

Secondly, congregation, it is important to know that those who are named need redemption as much as the unnamed. In fact, David and Solomon are contrasted—I believe—with Uriah to show the depths of their sin and the still greater depths of God's grace. David is described elsewhere as the man after God's own heart, and his son Solomon as the wisest ruler of all time. Yet both had their serious battles with sin and needed God's redemption.

The story we read in 2 Samuel 11 shows us David as the exact opposite of all that God has in mind for a king. Success has gone to his head. He's no longer a single-minded servant of God. He's no longer working hard to build the kingdom God has entrusted to his care. He's no longer a shepherd of the people who protects those in his care. He's become a king like the kings of our world, kings who serve themselves and build their kingdoms on the backs of the people they are supposed to be serving.

Our reading in 2 Samuel 11 gives us a clear picture of David's actions. But that action is described with words that make it even clearer. The writer describes David as a taker. After David lays his eyes on Bathsheba, we read in the older NIV translations in our pew Bibles,

*2 Sam 11:4 So David sent messengers and **took** her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.*

This taking sounds harsh. It is self-centred and perhaps even violent.

Now, if we go back a little, we find that this is exactly what the prophet Samuel warned Israel would happen when they asked for a king. Just listen to these excerpts from 1 Samuel 8,

*<sup>1</sup> Sam 8:10 So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. <sup>11</sup> He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you:*

*he will **take your sons** and appoint them (as soldiers)*

*<sup>13</sup> He will **take your daughters** to be perfumers...*

*<sup>14</sup> He will **take the best of your fields**...*

*<sup>15</sup> He will **take the tenth of your grain** and of your vineyards*

*<sup>16</sup> He will **take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys**...*

*<sup>17</sup> He will **take the tenth of your flocks**, and (listen to this) **you shall be his slaves**. <sup>18</sup> And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves...."*

Even Israel's best king was a taker. David stoops to all sorts of lows because he forgets who put him on the throne. He lets his position and wealth go to his head. Just stop and think about that. There might be a lesson in this for our society. It's a reminder to think about what our wealth might do to us, how it might poison our view of others and make us think too highly of ourselves. Money and power are not bad in and of themselves. But when we forget that everything is given to us from God for his purposes, then we can get ourselves into trouble.

Friends, David took what was not his though he had more than enough already. He took despite the fact that everything was from the Lord and he should be content with what was given to him. In fact, he had so much that he should have been sharing. You see, it was the Lord who gave Israel all she had. It was the Lord, therefore, who also gave David all that he had. The Lord helped him over and over and over again to withstand the murderous plots of Saul. The Lord protected him and gave him the throne. The Lord helped him overcome all of Israel's enemies so that the people could live in peace and enjoy the prosperity of their land of milk and honey. The Lord had been his good shepherd and put David on the throne to be a good shepherd for Israel.

However, once David has become politically and financially secure, we see that he starts to think and act like he deserves whatever he wants. He is no longer content with all that God has given him. No, he wants more. He's no longer contented to live a God-fearing life, running the affairs of the country with integrity and seeking the good of all citizens. He's no longer a shepherd of the people. Now he takes what he wants because he has power.

David does not even have respect for a man like Uriah who is one of his top soldiers (2 Sam 23:39). Our chapter does a great job of contrasting David's lack of integrity with the high level of integrity in Uriah. First of all, David stays home and lounges around the palace while his soldiers are off at war (v.1). He is no longer leading as a king ought. He has basically said, "I've done enough. I have other people who can do the dirty work for me now." Then, secondly, he starts living for

himself and gratifying his sinful desires. His lounging around indicates an attitude of “Now that I’ve got it made, I’m just going to do whatever I please.” People in our society have that attitude as well when it comes to having lots of money or using all their spare time for selfish pursuits. I’ve earned it. It’s mine. I can do what I want now. So, David takes Uriah’s wife and has an adulterous affair with her. She gets pregnant and he schemes to cover it up by ordering Uriah home from battle.

Uriah, however, won’t go to his home and sleep with his wife because he has so much respect for his fellow soldiers who are still away from their families. As far as he is concerned, he is still on duty. His integrity is so high that even when David gets Uriah drunk so that he’ll forget about what the other soldiers are going through, Uriah still won’t go home to sleep with Bathsheba. Uriah has more integrity drunk than David has sober! David then resorts to a still more sinister plan that gets Uriah killed so he can take Bathsheba as his wife and hopefully cover up his adultery and her pregnancy.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen. You see, at this point in his life, David already has 6 wives. But he steals the wife of another man. He takes Bathsheba because he can. He follows his sinful, lustful desires and tramples on anything in his way. When Nathan the prophet confronts David in the following chapter, he compares David to a treacherous wealthy man who steals a neighboring family’s one and only sheep to feed a guest at his home when he has thousands of his own sheep that he could have butchered. “You’re just like that man,” Nathan tells David.

That’s when David is humbled and confesses his need for grace. The named need grace as much as the unnamed. Mighty or weak, man or woman, powerful or powerless, we all need grace!

### **All Needing and Receiving Grace**

Indeed, no one can come before God apart from his grace. We all need grace. And the good news is that it is ours through Jesus.

After Nathan confronted David with his sin, David wrote the words of Psalm 51 as a prayer of confession. David was humbled by the Lord and once again found grace from him. David recognizes his sinful nature—I’m sinful from birth, he says. He recognizes that all sin is ultimately sin against God—“against you, you only have I sinned” he says. And so before God he recognizes his guilt and recalls God’s grace.

Psalm 51 shows the power of God’s love and grace to change a man stuck in his sin. Men of power in that day—kings like David—would do what David did to Bathsheba. Take and take, as I said earlier. But for a man in power to repent of a sin was almost unheard of. What we learn from Psalm 51 is that the heart of God changed the heart of David.

So it is for us, dear people. Whether we feel named or unnamed in our world, we must look to Jesus. Whether we have power or not. Whether we are

weak or strong, wealthy or poor. Whether we are wronged or the wrongdoer, we need Jesus to heal us and also to help us receive forgiveness and to give it. We need the King that David was not and could not be. We need King Jesus who gives grace to all who look to him for it, regardless of our status or identity in society. Through his perfect life—taking our sin on himself as a baby born to Mary, then suffering and dying as our Good Shepherd, Jesus opens wide God’s arms of grace to us.

So, congregation, the grace of God comes to Uriah’s wife. Bathsheba is brought into the family line of the Messiah through sexual sin and criminal activity but nonetheless brought in, welcomed by God, healed and used by him for noble purposes. The grace of God comes to David, a lowly shepherd boy whom God raises up to rule his people. David succeeds on many levels and fails seriously on some. But God does not forsake him; he still uses him. And that story is our story too. None of us is without sin and untouched by the pain of sin inflicted against us.

That gives me hope in our cancel culture. There’s so much pride and hate in our world. You make a mistake, you do your time to pay for it, but the wrong people find out about it—even many years later—and you’re deemed unworthy forever. Everyone lines up to despise you for your sins of the past and declare you unfit for further service. There is no room for grace in a cancel culture.

The only way we are assured of grace to us is to look at the one who is the offspring of David and Bathsheba. He forgives and restores.

That means Jesus gives grace to live and also to serve again. Bathsheba’s story doesn’t end with her being taken by David. And David’s kingship doesn’t end because of his sin against her and Uriah. To be honest, though, both David and Bathsheba suffered lasting effects from this adultery, including the death of the child and a lot of family dysfunction in subsequent years. However, God didn’t forsake them. He continued to be faithful to them and to his promises. God blessed Bathsheba with more children, including Solomon who was next in the royal line. She became a faithful, servant-hearted wife to David, giving him good advice and helping him remember God’s promises for Solomon and the kingdom (1 Kgs. 1:11–53). Her faithfulness in small things ultimately made a big impact on the coming of Jesus from her family line. Perhaps this sort of faithfulness is something she learned alongside of her first husband Uriah who showed great integrity in his service to the kingdom.

In any event, friends, Bathsheba played a role in God’s plan to bring Jesus to us as our perfect King. Now it is our privilege and honour to acknowledge him as King of kings and Lord of lords, our sinless and servant King who is not ashamed to call us his sisters and brothers. Let his grace draw us closer to the God who is unashamed of our past but whose grace forgives and heals us and even uses us in his service. Indeed, our God works all things together for his good purposes in our lives and in the world.

Isn’t that Nuts—with a laugh! Indeed! Amen.