

JUDGE YOURSELF AS YOU WOULD JUDGE OTHERS

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Lessons: 2 Samuel 12:1-14

Children, how good are you at noticing when you have hurt someone's feelings? How good are you at realizing that you have done something wrong against the Lord or against another person? Do you notice right away when you have disobeyed the Lord or your parents? Or does it take a few hours or a few days before you realize that you have done anything wrong?

It is not always easy to notice that you have disobeyed the Lord or your parents, or to see that you have hurt someone in some way. That is because the evil spirits that try to get you to do bad things, also try to cloud your mind with false ideas so that you will think you have done nothing wrong when really you have. That is what happened in the story we read about King David last week. He broke five of the Lord's commandments, and thought that he had done nothing wrong because he had deceitfully tried to make it seem as though he had done nothing wrong. This week however, we read about how David at last saw through his false way of thinking, and was sorry for what he had done. As you listen to this story again, think about the way in which David finally saw the truth about what he had done, for you can use the same method for seeing the truth about the things that you have done wrong. Then you, too, will be able to be sorry for the bad things you do, and turn back to the Lord.

After David had murdered Uriah, and taken his wife for himself, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to him. The Lord always sees all the good and bad things everyone does, no matter how secretly those things have been done. When Nathan came to David, he told a parable--a made-up story--about two men. One was rich and had whole flocks of lambs. The other man was poor and had only one lamb which he bought when it was little. The poor man had raised it like a pet, right along side his own children. In fact, he loved it so well that it had been like a daughter to him, eating his food, and drinking from his own cup.

One day a traveler came and stayed with the rich man. It was a custom in those days to treat travelers very well. Perhaps you remember how Abraham, Gideon, and Manoah had all prepared calves or lambs to eat for angels who had visited them, thinking that the angels were travelers. The rich man, however, would not take one of his own lambs for the traveler. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb, killed it, and fixed it for the traveler's dinner. That was the story that Nathan told to King David.

King David did not know that it was just a parable. He thought it was a real story. He got very angry and said that the rich man would be put to death, and that he would have to give four lambs for the one he had taken, because he had no pity, that is, because he did not feel sorry for the poor man.

As you know from the story, as soon as David had said these things, Nathan told him that he, David, was the man who had taken the poor man's lamb. You can see from the story that this is so, for just as the rich man had many lambs, so David had many wives. Just as the poor man had one lamb which he loved, so Uriah the Hittite had only one wife whom he had loved. And just as the rich man took the poor man's only lamb, so David had taken Uriah's only wife, even though David had lots of wives.

When Nathan told David was the rich man whom David said should die, then Nathan told David how the Lord had been good to David, but how David had murdered Uriah and taken his wife. Then it was that David realized that he had sinned, and he told Nathan that he had sinned. And because he was able to admit that he had sinned against the Lord, Nathan told him that his sin was taken away, and he would not die.

Just as it was very difficult for David to realize what a wicked thing it was that he had done in taking Uriah's wife, so it is often very difficult for you to realize how wrong the things are that you have done. But just as it was easy for David to see how wicked a thing it was that the rich man in the parable had done, so it can be much easier for you to see the things you have done wrong if you judge yourself as you would judge others. For example, it may not seem very wrong for you to make a smart-alec remark to your father and disobey him. But then think of how you feel when you watch one of your friends make such a remark to their father and disobey them! Then you can easily see how wrong it is. Or think if you were your father, trying to teach his son or daughter to obey the commandment to honor your father and mother--how would you feel if your son or daughter did those things then?! If you can stop and judge yourself in the way that you would judge other people, if you can imagine that there was a story made up about someone else doing the thing you have done, then sometimes you can see how bad the wrong things are which you have done.

Did you notice that the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to tell the parable to David? Prophets are people who speak for the Lord. And what is it that especially speaks to each of you? It is the Word, of course. In the Word are many stories, many parables. Each one is about you in some way. You are like David murdering Uriah when you listen to evil spirits and try to hate someone secretly. You are like the rich man in the parable when you try to take something from someone else, no matter how few or many you seem to have--for the Lord gives every one just as much as they need, without them needing to steal from others.

So if you are to say you are sorry, and stop doing the bad things you have done, just as David said that he had sinned, you first need to know how bad the wrong things are that you have done. And to see how bad those wrong things are, you may be helped by judging yourself as you would judge someone else. You can do this by making up a story about your situation or by imagining you are the person to whom you did something, and that will help. But perhaps the best way is by reading the stories the Lord has already given in His Word. For these have already been given by the Lord Himself, to tell about each one of us. When we use these stories to recognize our faults and change our ways, then the Lord can use those stories to lead us from hell to heaven.

Amen.