

# How Are the Mighty Fallen

by Ian G. North

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*The sermon warns against spiritual complacency by examining the fall of King David and the importance of vigilance in faith.*

**Duration:** 47:41

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:11, Isaiah 43:25, Isaiah 44:22, Luke 21:34, Luke 21:36, 1 Peter 5:8

**Topics:** "Falling Away"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the encounter between the prophet Nathan and King David. Nathan confronts David about his sin, using a story about a rich man who steals a poor man's beloved lamb. David reacts with anger and declares that the man should die, not realizing that he is condemning himself. The preacher emphasizes the importance of staying humble and watchful, as David's downfall began with him relaxing and then being tempted by what he saw. The sermon also references the book of James, highlighting the role of our own evil desires in leading us into temptation.

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## Transcript

A couple of friends of mine whom I knew years ago and have since gone to North Africa as missionaries are again visiting the States. They have been serving the Lord in a North African nation, and you'll recall at the southern border of the Mediterranean Sea there are a number of nations there that are totally Muslim nations, and they are missionaries to one of those nations. And do you know, he pastors the only church in that nation.

And the congregation is made up mainly of foreigners, primarily French people who visit there on business and for diplomatic purposes. And the people of that nation, the citizens of that nation who are believers in Christ are not permitted to worship together. There is no possibility of open public confession of Christ unless it means death.

You cannot associate. There is only one church in that nation, and that is a foreign church. Does that give you a sense of privilege that you live in a land where you can meet together and worship our Lord freely? Do you know in another nation of that part of the world, there are only 40 known evangelical believers in a population of 40 million people? If you average that out, it would be like living in the city of Atlanta and you and one other person being the only Christians in the entire city.

We need to pray for the church of Jesus Christ in some of these nations. But one of the shocking things, I think, is that that part of the world where it is now almost impossible to find a true believer, was once many centuries ago a thriving center of Christian activity. You can visit in some of these countries in North Africa the old broken down ruins of great churches of the past, but they are there no longer.

The light has been taken away. You think of the great church at Alexandria. Well, that is in Egypt today, and there are churches there.

But what happened? How did a whole church vanish? You think of the book of Revelation, the letters to the seven churches and the letter to the church at Ephesus, a church that was so blessed by God, and yet to the church at Ephesus, and remember that was the church that received Paul's great letter called the epistle to the Ephesians, with some of the richest truth in the New Testament. But when you get to the book of Revelation, you find these words from the risen Lord, I have something against you, you Christians at Ephesus. You have lost your first love.

And then the call to repent, or else I will take the lamp of testimony away from you. And this is what happened to the church in North Africa. But listen, it can not only happen to a whole church, but it can happen to individuals.

It can happen to people who have risen to great heights spiritually. It can happen, and it can happen to us. It can happen to me, and I tremble.

The apostle Paul said, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. I would like to turn today to the Old Testament, to the second book of Samuel chapter 11. Second Samuel chapter 11.

This is the story of David, the great king of Israel. Keep your finger in chapter 11, and just turn back with me to chapter 1. Second Samuel chapter 1, recounts the message that was brought to King David, then about the death of Saul, before David actually was announced as the king. And the news was brought that King Saul had been killed.

As a result, David, a poet, a songwriter, wrote a lamentation over Saul and Jonathan, his son. And you have it recorded here in Second Samuel chapter 1, beginning from verse 19. The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places.

How are the mighty fallen? A reference, of course, to the fact that the king of Israel, Saul, had fallen and been killed under shameful circumstances. And you have that theme running through it again in verse 25, for example. Verse 25, how are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle? And again in verse 27, how are the mighty fallen? The words that young David, strong and courageous, dedicated to God, wrote about Saul could well be written about David himself later in life.

How are the mighty fallen? The incident to which we're going to refer here occurred when David was about 50 years of age. And by that age, you would expect a man to be solid, stable, strong in his spiritual life, growing. He has learned by experience.

He has faced all the temptations. And if he has remained steadfast, one would expect a man of 50 to go on from there gloriously. And David had risen now.

He lived in a magnificent palace, no doubt, on King Zion, on Mount Zion. He had a glorious army. He was powerful.

He had a glorious court of counselors. Not only that, but his material blessings were exceeded by his spiritual maturity. And his natural gifts.

And yet, at the very pinnacle of his achievements and his blessing, we find him entering into an experience which from that point on became literally the turning point of his life and a turning downwards because he never again achieved the stability and the security that he enjoyed at that point. And from this point on, his reign seems to be constantly plagued by distress and trouble and battle and defeat. He seems to have lost something at this point.

Now that can happen to any of us. And I pray that as the prophet Nathan pointed his finger at King David and said to David, you are the man, that we might feel the finger of God pointing to us, each one today, and hear God say, you are the one. You are the one.

You are the one. The story begins in chapter 11. And it came to pass after the year was expired at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel.

And they destroyed the children of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. Now the previous winter and fall, the battle had gone well. And David had led the army out against the Ammonites and the Syrians.

And the Ammonites had been in ally with the Syrians as far as to the Euphrates River and then beyond. And it was a colossal military alliance that came against King David, but he led his army triumphantly. It was a great victory.

Of the enemy, 700 chariots were destroyed. You could think in terms of tanks today, I suppose, 700 tanks and 40,000 horsemen. And there was a great victory.

But then, when it came to the next spring, and the time for kings to go back to battle, we find that David, instead of going out again to lead his army, sent his general, Joab, and remained himself behind. Now, in the story that we are confronting this morning, we see first of all a great sin, and then we see a great sermon, and we see a great salvation. Follow with me the steps in David's downward slide to sin.

Firstly, he relaxed. The first step down from a pinnacle of high achievement, he relaxed. Notice what it says in the latter part of verse one, but David tarried still at Jerusalem.

And then in the first part of verse two, it came to pass in the evening tide that David arose from off his bed. He was relaxing. He was taking it easy.

The scriptures say, woe to them that are at ease in Zion. I tell you, you might take it easy and relax, but the devil never does. He never lets up in his attack, in his attempt to subvert and destroy the Christian.

It is fatal to relax spiritually. There is no such thing as taking a spiritual holiday, but David took a spiritual holiday. He was relaxing.

Somebody has said that the expansive hour of relaxation after a great victory is the hour of maximum danger. That's worth writing down and underlining and memorizing. The expansive hour of relaxation after a great victory is the hour of maximum danger.

I think all of us know those mountaintops of spiritual victory, a new understanding of what God wants to do in us, a new realization of the victory of Christ in us. And we go away saying, oh, how marvelous, it will be victory from now on. And we let our guard down.

We relax. Now, there's such a thing, of course, as resting in Christ, but resting in Christ does not mean inactivity. Because Jesus said, take my yoke upon you and learn of me.

In the very same words in which he said, come to me and rest. But a yoke was an implement that yoked the oxen together so that they could pull together and achieve together. And Jesus says, take my yoke on you.

When you're in yoke with Jesus Christ, there is inward rest, but not inactivity. When you give way to inactivity and you relax and let your guard down, you are in great danger. The Lord Jesus Christ warned his disciples about this.

For example, in Luke chapter 10, we find the disciples coming back and reporting to Jesus. In Luke chapter 10, verse 17, the 70 returned again with joy saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. Well, they were really thrilled and excited.

They'd never had an experience like that. Even the devils have to obey us when we use your name, Lord. They were so thrilled at this newfound authority.

Do you know what Jesus said? Don't get excited about that. I'll tell you what to rejoice in. He said, rejoice in God's grace to you.

Rejoice in God's mercy to you that your names are written in heaven. Because if you start glorying in an experience, if you start glorying in a great victory, you're on dangerous, slippery ground. We need to be kept low at the feet of Jesus Christ in humble, grateful submission to him.

And this is why Jesus says, watch and pray. He warns his disciples in Luke 21, verse 34, warning them of the things that are to come, the trials and temptations. Luke chapter 21, verse 34, Jesus said, take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life.

And so that day come upon you unawares. Who would think of these things happening to the disciples of Jesus, that they should give way to drunkenness and carousing. And yet he says to them in verse 36, watch ye therefore and pray always that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the son of man.

Jesus says, watch, be sober. He repeats it again. And the apostle Peter in first Peter chapter five, verse eight, he says, be diligent, be vigilant, be watchful, be sober for your adversary, the devil, goes around as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

Be watchful. Don't relax. Don't rest.

Don't become idle. Don't become careless. We don't know how long this had been going on with David.

This physical relaxation, no doubt was preceded by a spiritual declension. He had become careless about his reading of God's word. I'm sure of that because when you read Psalm 119, he says, how shall a young man cleanse his way by taking heed to thy word? Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.

And evidently he had neglected the word. It had slipped out of his heart. He had become careless in his prayer life too, no doubt.

And there was a general declension and he was relaxing. He had declined in his spiritual life. The fire was burning low.

He had lost his first love. He relaxed. Secondly, the second step to this awful involvement in the spider's web of sin, verse two, it came to pass in an evening tide that David arose from off his bed and walked upon the roof of the king's house.

And from the roof, he saw a woman washing herself. And the woman was very beautiful to look upon. The second thing he saw, first he relaxed, secondly, he saw.

And what he saw with his physical eyes became an occasion of temptation in his heart. You need to link that with in the New Testament, the book of James, James chapter one and verse fourteen. We read, every man is tempted when he is drawn away, another translation, has a dragged away by his own evil desires and enticed.

Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. He saw a beautiful, a very beautiful woman washing herself evidently in a neighboring house. From his vantage point on the flat roof of his palace there on Mount Zion, he looked down into a neighbor's backyard and there he saw this woman no doubt beside the well drawing the water and washing herself.

And he allowed himself to look at this beautiful woman and he allowed his thoughts to begin to move towards her and evil desires began to develop within his own heart. Now temptation most often or very frequently comes to us through the senses of the body. Not only the eyes, but the touch, the ears, and knowingly or unknowingly, this beautiful woman was allowing herself to be the occasion for stimulating temptation in the mind of this noble spiritual man, King David.

We need to be very careful, dear friends, that we by our dress, our appearance, by the language we use, the stories we tell, by the magazines we allow others to read on our tables, the television programs we view and allow our children to view, we need to be very careful that we are not putting temptation in the way of somebody for whom God has some great and glorious plan. Because that could become the occasion of stumbling. Little did Bathsheba know that when she took her bath that morning, the sequence of events to follow would drag one of God's greatest saints down into the mud and the dirt.

David saw. Well, somebody says you can't help seeing. And I know that it's possible to be attracted like that.

But as somebody has said, it's not the first look that matters, it's the second. I remember hearing of a man who talked to the friend of a great evangelist. And the gentleman said to the friend of the man of God, doesn't he ever have any impure thoughts? And the friend replied, why, yes, of course he does, but he doesn't entertain them.

So a thought reaps an action. It begins with the thought. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.

The scriptures talk about people whose eyes are full of adultery. They cannot look at another person without lusting after that person in their heart. Now, David was a married man.

He had children, and yet he allowed himself to look lustfully at a woman other than his wife. He saw. Thirdly, he inquired.

Verse three. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? So David inquired.

The next step, to follow the look with the inquiry, to deepen the curiosity, to feed the desire. Now watch it. The first few minutes after the first impact of a temptation may very well determine the final outcome, and very often does.

The first few minutes after the first impact of the temptation will determine the final outcome. How we need to guard our hearts. The Bible says, keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

He inquired about this woman. I don't know why he even needed to inquire. She was a well-known person.

She was the daughter of Ahithophel, who was one of David's chief counselors. Not the daughter. She was the granddaughter of Ahithophel, one of King David's greatest counselors.

And she was the wife of Uriah, who was one of David's 37 men that constituted his personal bodyguard. So David knew very well who this woman was, and to whom she was married. But he inquired after her.

He began to feed his lust. He wanted more information. No doubt, he sent a messenger to see if she was free to come and meet him.

That kind of inquiry, perhaps. There is no indication that Bathsheba offered any resistance whatsoever, or gave any excuse. She was a willing partner to what followed.

Watch the inquiry. There is something of perversity in the human heart that likes to inquire after that which is forbidden, that which is curious, that which is sinful. I think many young people are drawn into the drug culture because of this kind of perverse curiosity.

They see what it does to their friends. They've seen some of their friends writhing under the terrible results of drug addiction, and yet they do it themselves. Why does the perversity of the human heart in all of us to inquire after that which is sinful? He inquired.

The fourth step. He yielded. We read in verse four, David sent messengers and took her, and she came in unto him, and he lay with her, for she was purified from her uncleanness, and she returned unto her house.

He yielded to the temptation. I wonder if it was perhaps this that brought from David's lips and pen later on, Psalm 73, where in Psalm 73 and verse 22, he says this, So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee. I was as a beast before thee.

Dear friend, when you give way to your lower physical impulses and you allow your lower appetites to dictate to you, you are acting as an animal, as a beast. You are not acting as someone created in the image of God. Well, you might say, didn't God give us this appetite, this desire? Yes, God did, but he gave us these physical attributes to be the slave to the mental and the spiritual, not the reverse.

And when a man becomes the slave of his physical appetites, he is as a beast. He's acting as an animal. That's the level of his behavior.

So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee. In Romans chapter 6 and verse 19, Paul talks about lending the members of our body to do evil. In Romans chapter 6, verse 19, As you have yielded

your members, the members of your body, as servants of uncleanness to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now yield your members, servants to righteousness unto holiness.

Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny. Fifthly, he feared. He feared.

This is very obvious by what follows in Genesis chapter 3, verse 8, when Adam and Eve sinned, what happened? They fled to hide themselves in the leaves of the tree from the presence of God. Why did they flee? Because they were afraid. There is no more terrible inquisitor than a guilty conscience.

There is no greater defeat than the loss of your proper self-respect and love. There is no greater pain than the torment of knowing that you have irrevocably fallen short of your highest and best ideals. And this is now beginning to happen to this man David.

He fears. He's afraid. What's he afraid of? Well, it would seem in what followed that he was afraid more of public exposure than of his relationship with God.

Afraid of being shown up for what we really are. Now, follow what happens very carefully. The sixth point, he contrived.

Now, when we commit a sin, most often we contrive to cover that sin. But what happens? Sin is like a snowball rolling down a hill, and it grows and it multiplies. This is what happened in this case.

You can cut it short by confession and cleansing and restoration with God, but if you don't deal with it that way, it will inevitably multiply. What happened now? Here's the picture. He has committed adultery with Bathsheba.

She sends a message to him. Verse five, the woman conceived and sent and told David and said, I am with child. Maybe only David knows at this point and Bathsheba.

But you see what this means? When this child is born, then the story will be out. Everybody will know. And so David contrives.

He sends a message to his general to send Uriah home with a message of the battle. Uriah comes, and when Uriah comes, David says, go down to your house and enjoy some time with your wife. You see what he's trying to do? Naturally, the child that will be born would be the result of the proper union between the husband and the wife.

And Uriah came in, and instead of going down to be with his wife that night, Uriah sleeps right there with the other guards and the other soldiers. And we read in verse 10, when they told David, saying Uriah went not down to his house, David said to Uriah, camest thou not from thy journey? Why then didst thou not go down to thy house? And Uriah said to David, the ark and Israel and Judah abide in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camped in the open fields. Shall I then go into my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As thou livest, as thy soul liveth, I'll not do this thing.

He was a true soldier at heart, totally dedicated to his master, King David, and to his calling as a soldier, and he would not compromise that disciplined devotion. Well, David was confused by this, and we read in verse 12, David said to Uriah, tarry here today also, and tomorrow I'll let thee go, hoping that he would go down to be with his wife, but again he didn't. So David made a big party that night, and he invited Uriah,

and we read here in verse 13, when David had called Uriah, he did eat and drink before him, and he, David, made Uriah drunk.

The decline in this man David, contriving to cover his sins. Proverbs 28 13 says, he who covers his sins will not prosper. He will not prosper.

He made Uriah drunk, hoping that when Uriah was drunk, of course, his natural restraints would be down, and he'd yield to his normal impulses and go to be with his wife, but Uriah didn't. And next day, David made up his mind. He contrived further.

That had not worked. He sent a letter with Uriah back to Joab saying, put Uriah in the forefront of the battle, and then let the other soldiers fall back from him so that he is killed at the hands of the Ammonites. Unbelievable that David should contrive this against Uriah, the Hittite, certainly not one of the Israelites, but a faithful servant of King David and Uriah, using the name Yahweh, indicating that Uriah, the Hittite, was a convert to the God of Israel and a loyal soldier of King David, and now David contrives to murder this faithful soldier by the hand of the enemy.

His ruse worked. He contrived successfully, but all the hypocrisy of the thing, it's all covered up now, and David goes on ruling and reigning and judging and passing sentence on crime and guiding the people's destiny as if nothing had happened, as if there'd never been a Bathsheba or a Uriah. But listen, God has not forgotten.

God has not forgotten, and no matter how I contrive to cover up my sins of the past, God has not forgotten. Galatians 6, 7, and 8, be not mocked. God is not mocked.

Be not deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. He that sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

The months go by. Turning over to chapter 12, listen, God ruthlessly perfects whom he royally elects. God has his hand on this man David, and David is not going to go away entirely from God's purpose.

Listen, God has called you. The Bible says you are elect according to the foreknowledge of God through sanctification of the Spirit, and God has called you for his purpose. He won't let you go ultimately.

God sends Nathan. How would you like to be confronted with a man who can read all your thoughts and all your motives and recite to you all the history of your private life? Such was the prophet Nathan as he came before David, and he preached to David about a three-minute sermon, one of the greatest sermons, one of the most convicting sermons, and God the Holy Spirit used this sermon. That day, God gave that faithful prophet Nathan the soul of King David, but Nathan had to put his life on the line for it.

Not an easy thing to do in the presence of a king, but Nathan came into the presence of the king, and he began to tell the king a story. Are you familiar with the story? There was a rich man who had a big flock of sheep, and there was a poor man who was his neighbor who had one little ewe lamb that he fed and kept as his own member of the family and loved it like a daughter, and the little lamb slept in the room with them, and then to the rich man's house came some visitors, and the rich man, instead of taking one of his own sheep and lambs and dressing it for the visitors, stole the one little ewe lamb of his poor neighbor, killed it, dressed it, and served it up to his guests. Such a story would be calculated to touch the heart of a shepherd, and shepherd David, now the king, reacts violently.

In verse 5, 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. David walked right into the trap, didn't he? It was set, and he went right in. But how self-righteous we become with the sins and faults of others.

It seems that he had become totally blind to his own guilt. The hardness of the heart reaches its most dangerous point when we no longer sense our own fault, but see only the faults of others. No wonder Jesus said, judge not that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and the measure you meet, it shall be measured to you again.

David went on, he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity. Two things David blames this man for. One, he did the thing.

It was wrong in the first place, and secondly, that rich man showed no compassion for the poor man. The very things David himself was guilty of, and we read in verse 7, Nathan said to David, you are that man. You are that man.

Then follows the exhortation from Nathan, plunging the dagger of conviction deeper and deeper into the heart of King David, and David sees himself absolutely stripped before God with no hiding place. Now there is no possibility of sham or cover up. It's all known, and my friends, what does it matter if nobody knows, but only God? It matters everything, and God knows.

No wonder David in Psalm 139 says, search me, O God, and he says, where shall I go from thy presence? You can't escape the presence of God. He's the unseen listener to every conversation that you have in your office, in your home. He's the unseen witness to every action.

Though nobody else knows what you have done, it matters everything that God knows, and your accounting has to be with him, so then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. The result, no longer hiding himself, no longer blaming others, no longer justifying his action as king, David humbly responds, and we find that in verse 13, David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. Simple words.

King Saul said similar words. He said, I've sinned. He omitted the words against the Lord because you see, King Saul was not concerned about his relationship with God at that stage.

King Saul was concerned only that he might placate the prophet Samuel and gain his favor and his prestige in his nation, but David is not concerned now to placate Nathan. He's only concerned that once more his relationship with God might be restored. In Psalm 51, David prays, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

I wonder if this is the prayer in somebody's heart this morning. Psalm 51 was written in relation to this event. We are led to understand, and no wonder Paul prays, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and here he says, I have sinned against the Lord.

I can well imagine David at this point falling prostrate down there on the floor before Nathan. I can well imagine the brokenness, the sobs that come from the heart of this man David in the realization of his guilt before God. How long he lay there, we don't know, but the prophet Nathan was evidently fully, totally convinced that David's repentance was genuine and sincere because of the words that follow.

Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die. What beautiful words, dear friend. Well, we might say it sounds too easy.

Do you mean he commits adultery with a woman, which in those days was sentenced by death, and he then contrives the murder of one of his most loyal soldiers, and just like that, the prophet comes along and says, the Lord has put away your sin from you. Well, we ask that question because we still think so much in terms of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. We think so much in terms of earning our salvation by our good works, and we think at least we should have allowed time for David to do a few good works to prove his sincerity.

But you see, we have underestimated the immense, unfathomable generosity of God, his incredible love. And not only that, although it was easy for the prophet Nathan to say, the Lord has put away your sin, it was not easy for the Lord to put away his sin because it cost the Lord Calvary. We ask the question, why was it so easy? Because we do not see the altar of sacrifice in the heart of God.

Oh, that we might acknowledge and affirm with joy that Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world, and that means your sin and mine, every last sin that you and I have committed. The Lord has put away thy sin. Is there someone here this morning with sin staining the heart, and you're burdened and sorrowful, you feel guilty, you feel haunted, you can't look that person in the face? I want to tell you, the Lord has put away your sin.

Good news? And the Lord will not remember your sins against you anymore. This is the promise of God in Isaiah, chapter 44, verse 22. Grasp these words with all your being.

God says, I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins. Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee. Or take verse 25 of the previous chapter.

I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions. There you are. Write them all down.

God has blotted them out. God has blotted them out. It is said that on one occasion, Martin Luther, the great preacher of the German Reformation, was in his room one day alone, and it seemed to him that the devil came into his room.

And we don't often have that kind of experience, but it seemed to him that there visualized before him was Satan. And Satan had in his hand a long scroll, which he opened up in front of Martin Luther, and written on the scroll was a great list of all of Martin Luther's sins of the past. And the devil sneeringly said to Martin Luther, you call yourself a child of God.

You say you are justified by faith. You say you are right with God. Look at this list of your sins.

To which Martin Luther replied, yes, all that you have written is true, and much more besides. No one only to God and to me. But now, right under your list, these words, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

The devil rolled his scroll in great fright and ran. The blood of Jesus Christ has put away your sin. David found a place of restoration, and the result, the result, God gave him tokens of restoration.

And God does that in his grace and love, because there was born, there was born to Bathsheba a son, whom David called Solomon. And the word Solomon means peaceable. And the prophet Nathan gave that

little boy another name, which means beloved of the Lord.

You see, these were tokens of God's love. And God loves you. And God has tokens for you as you turn to Christ.

And he'll load your life with his blessings and his love. And you can do that right now.

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