The Lord loved him

2 Samuel 12:13b-31,

Key verse 24b-25

The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

“Amazing Grace” is one of the most widely recognized songs of all time. It’s written by John Newton. He was born in London in 1725. He grew up in a Christian family but he did not know God. One day as a young man, he gave up his faith. Starting his career at sea, he became involved with the slave trade for a few years which was one of popular businesses to make money those days. On May 10, 1748, his ship was caught in a terrible storm. As it seemed, the ship would certainly be lost, he cried out, “Lord, have mercy upon me.” He later reflected on that moment , writing the song, “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.” He personally accepted God’s love and became a new creation, giving his life to Jesus and become a messenger of such amazing grace!

How about king David? Throughout the book of Kings, David is the measuring line of all later kings “Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God” is a repeated remark for most of them. David shows many noble characteristics such as not seeking the death of Saul as God’s anointed despite Saul’s unfair hunting of him, loyalty to his friend Jonathan, and his kindness to Jonathan’s disabled son. Whenever we saw his noble qualities he looked like superman. But with his critical sins he’s like one of us. But what really counts is God’s unfailing love for him and his personal faith & prayer. Today I would like to focus on God’s abundant grace and unfailing love on him despite his sins and then how David responded when he was rebuked because he knows God’s love personally.

Last week, we learned that God’s servant Nathan confronted king David with his sins. As a king David could have ignored him. But David confessed by saying “I have sinned against the Lord.”  In fact, it was a dangerous confession because he could face death penalty under Moses’ law. David committed both adultery and first-degree murder; a willful and premeditated crime. Even according to our federal law, first degree murder is for death sentence. How does Moses’ law say? Leviticus 20:10 reads, “‘If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.” Leviticus 24:17 reads, “‘Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death.” Surely David must be put to death. But look at verse 13b. “‘Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.”’ We may wonder why God took away David’s sin and promised that he is not going to die. I thought about it and found the legitimate reason that it has to do with God’s word of promises in 7:15-16, saying “But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” Look at verse 14. “But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die.” Here I believe that the way to see God and David is as a father-son relationship. They may experience conflict, however God will not forsake David, as his son. God gives David freedom as a father would allow his adult son. God disciplines him as a father. When God forgives his sins, there are still painful consequences. The child born to David and Bathseba would die, though his sin was forgiven. Sin has painful consequences. God deals with sin in a way that makes it very clear how a holy and righteous God is and he shows us that he hates sin.

What does David do at this situation? Did he give up on his son because he became ill according to what God told him through Nathan? Look at v 15-17. “After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became ill. 16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. 17 The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.” David can be a role model for us in his personal faith in showing us how to be closer to God in times of trouble, trusting God’s unfailing love. Do you know the meaning of David’s name? It is “beloved.” Although he committed sins and was disciplined by God, he still trusted in his Father’s love. His prayer was not casual but serious. For a whole week 24 hours a day, David did nothing but pray while lying on the ground. He refused to allow anything or anyone distract him from his prayer. His servants tried to comfort him and give him something to eat, but he refused. What do you think he prayed during that time? Let us read Psa. 51:1-12 which shows how he prayed that time. “Have mercy on me, O God,  according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 3For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” Later V 17 reads, “My sacrifice,  God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

David prays further for his son before God. This, however, raises a question. God is going to do whatever he wants to do anyway. So we may wonder why  he prayed for him? The answer to David’s motivation maybe found in v 22, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept for I said, ‘Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’” Here notice the word, “gracious.” When he heard that he wouldn’t die although he deserved to die, he must have experienced God’s love and appreciated God’s grace. Through prayer he asked God’s mercy on his baby again with the expectation of changing God’s verdict upon his baby.

I do not mean to be misleading here.  It doesn’t mean that we’re able to twist God’s arm to get whatever we want. For a moment here let us check our prayers and possible common mistake on our daily practice of prayer. We often times give God our urgent list of “needs” and expect him to graciously answer our prayer the way we want. But the purpose of prayer is not to give God our wish list no matter how urgent it look. It is not for him to give us everything we really want. Rather the whole point behind prayer is to be closer to him by trusting his unchanging love in any situations. The more we pray, the closer we get to God in convincing His love. So my next question would be, “Do we worship God when he says, “No?” It’s not too hard to accept the answer when God answers with a “yes.” The hard part can be when God says either “no” or “wait.” It is possible to be frustrated with God’s answer because they’re not the answers we wanted to hear. It’s easy to be like Ahab who was looking for favorable answers from false prophets. (1 Kings 22:7) So we have two choices we can either turn our back on God or accept what his answer may be. But often times we doubt God’s love and ended up complaining about God who is not listening to us. We may even come to the point where we question the existence of God. But we can learn from David here that he humbly responded to God’s sovereignty. He humbly accepted God’s decision and submitted himself to the Lord.

When David’s son died, his servants were afraid(18) to tell him what had happened. So they stood around and whispered to each other. I can imagine the conversation between the servants. The first one said, “You tell him.” The second said, “Not me.  Somebody has to tell him though. You’ve been a servant longer than I have.” David could see them whispering, and drew his own conclusion, saying, “Is the child dead?” Their answer was, “He is dead.” The servants probably waited to see what would happen next. Look at v 20. “Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.” David got up from the ground. He went and took a shower. He put on clean clothes. He then went to worship God. Then he came home and ate a good meal. I can see the servants standing with their jaws hanging open. Such a thing must have been unimaginable. Look at v 21. “‘His attendants asked him, “Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!”’ While the child was still alive, David fasted, wept, and prayed. David has done all that he could. But now the child is dead. God has given David a clear and final answer: “No.” David sees death as the time to cease those activities. David knows when to start praying and when to stop praying.

Similarly in 2 Corinthians 12, we find that the apostle Paul prayed to God. He said in v 7b-9, “Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ” The Lord said “no” to Paul’s request. Paul goes on to say, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” Here the power of Christ is not merely the power to remove whatever troubled Paul. Rather Apostle Paul gladly accepts the grace of Jesus that is greater than even the power to remove it. The point of prayer is to have a closer relationship with God. Similarly the true miracle of David’s situation was not that the child was healed, but even greater than that the relationship between God and David remains intact.  In short, the point of our prayer should not be to simply get things from God.  Instead we should focus on getting as close as we can to Him and His love by asking that He helps us to come close to Him. In this regard, our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the best example of all.

When Jesus knew on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus said to his disciples, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” Jesus also knew that all his disciples would desert him. In Mk 14:36, Jesus prayed, “*Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” First of all Jesus called him as Abba. In this moment of deep distress, Jesus didn’t doubt God’s love or feel far from God the Father. He come close to the Father in his personal prayer that He used the name Abba, a child’s familiar name for “daddy.” His relationship with God never changed. Their relationship even grew even more loving and closer than ever before. He prayed that God would find another way to solve the problem of sin. Jesus knew what really lay ahead for him. The pain and the agony along with humiliation lay ahead. There was also the matter of separation from God as he carried the weight of our sins on him. He didn’t want to experience this. He prayed that God would make another way. God answered, “No, this is the only way.” Jesus accepted God’s answer and trusted his Father and took up his cross to the end. Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished.” In this way we become the direct recipients or beneficiaries of God’s saving grace and love in and through Jesus who loved his Father to the end. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift through Jesus. Without Jesus death on the cross, we would not have salvation. Thanks to Jesus, we are not only saved but become coheirs of his heavenly eternal kingdom. Amen.

Look at v 23. “But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”  What made David’s disposition change? What can we learn from him? Here I believe that David’s newborn baby is a shadow of Jesus Christ. 2 Corin. 5:20b & 21 read, “Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus himself did not become a sinner, even though he bore all our sins. This is the gospel message! That Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross and remained a perfect Savior through the whole suffering and proved by his resurrection. Likewise David was justified by a baptism into Jesus’ death. He is now raised from the dead and he is able to live a new life. Let us read Romans 6:5-10 responsively. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.” So what David has just said here shows his personal faith to see this life and the world to come as God’s new creation. From now on he is not living to make his old mistakes again, but to live a borrowed life in Jesus Christ. David humbly accepted God’s sovereign will and confessed, “I will go to my child, but he will not return to me.” This means that there is only one way. He renewed his heart and admitted that his earthly life has a clear direction to the kingdom of God. When he lost his vision and hope in the eternal kingdom of God, he committed sins. He had lost sight of his loving relationship with God. But now he was able to come back to his senses and resume the right direction through God’s love. With his hope in the kingdom of God, from now on he will prepare himself newly to go meet his Lord again. With his faith in resurrection, he envisioned that he would meet his baby at God’s time. Above all David must’ve renewed his love for God.

Look at v 24 &25. “Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; 25 and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.”  It seems improbable that God would bless the union of David and Bathsheba for it was so contaminated with sin. Verse 15 reads, “And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David.” Now look at v 24. It says, “Then David comforted his wife.” Bathsheba has gone from being Uriah’s wife to David’s wife in the course of this passage after David’s prayer. Imagine the culture that was ruled by the law in those days. People might have demanded the blood of Bathsheba by stoning her to death as a consequence for her adultery. But when David personally received God’s grace and mercy, he must have protected her from possible condemnation from the people. So it was only by God’s grace that David and Bathsheba had been freed from condemnation. Again David’s prayer to spare the life of his son resulted in David growing faith being closer to the Lord, receiving more peace from God than ever before. So the meaning of Solomon is “peace” which shows David’s mind after his sins were forgiven by God through our Lord Jesus Christ who shed his blood on the cross. Also his given name through Nathan according to God’s will was Jedidiah which means “loved by God.” So it is very interesting to see God naming his baby like his father David which means beloved. God’s love never changes but God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Praise God whose heart is filled with his compassion, love, and mercy.

Look at v 26-31. “Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel. 27 Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, “I have fought against Rabbah and taken its water supply. 28 Now muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me.” 29 So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it. 30 David took the crown from their king’s head, and it was placed on his own head. It weighed a talent of gold, and it was set with precious stones. David took a great quantity of plunder from the city 31 and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brickmaking. David did this to all the Ammonite towns. Then he and his entire army returned to Jerusalem.”  In this last portion of the passage God gives David a victory out of his love for him. In the previous chapter he did not go out for battle against God’s enemies. But now by God’s grace he resumed his leadership to fight the good fight for God’s glory after renewing his loving relationship with God.

When I came here as a missionary, I prayed that I may get a green card within a year and planned to be a successful missionary quickly. But God did not answer my prayer as I wished. Rather it took 10 years to get a green card. I was frustrated. I could not understand why. But later I realized that God sometimes delayed in sending an answer to my prayer in order that his will may be accomplished and his holy name may be glorified through training me according to His personal love for me. I realized that it was high time to come closer to him and have a deeper personal loving relationship with the Lord. Also it’s time to trust in Jesus who is my shepherd and my Lord in any situations. Jesus transformed such tough time into a blessed time to pray and commit my life to Jesus and to his command. Since then my loving relationship with him grew a lot. As a matter of fact looking back on my life in him, I can not but say that God answered my prayer perfectly out of His abundant grace and mercy. My long time prayer topic was to live a meaningful life instead of pursuing a worldy dream according to my old name. God also gave me real hope in this transient life to serve God’s eternal kingdom purpose with my whole heart. This year my key verse comes from 1 Peter 5:2, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.” God helped me to be eager to serve God’s flock. Through preparing this passage I was inspired with God’s love and saw colleges as a harvest field to introduce God’s love newly. So I went out inviting students to study the Bible at USC. I met a student looking for the meaning and purpose of his life. Praise the Lord who helped me to resume serving in God’s unfailing love. May the Lord help me to continue to grow in Jesus’ love so that I may share His grace and love in serving students with the word of God. Amen.

In conclusion) Before the creation and David was born, God called him, loved him and named him David, “beloved” and at God’s time chose him as a king and promised him to establish him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel. God says, “But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” (7:15-16) It was a simply undeserved grace and favor for David, the youngest son of Jesse. God’s grace and mercy are at the culminating point even after David committed terrible sins. God mercifully holds the door open for reconciliation and forgiveness. Like David, we too are adopted as God’s children(Rom 8:16) God in his grace and mercy has chosen us to be forgiven, even as he forgave David. We can rely on God’s promise and His love. We like David are part of his story! Ephesians 1:7 reads “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.” We’re more than conquerors through Jesus who loves us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us share such amazing love with others!  Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever. (2 Chronicles 20:21) One word: The Lord loves you!