

Sermon Given by

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2 Samuel 13 - "All in the Family"

I wonder what you make of this passage? It's a desperately sad story of rape and murder, and sadly it isn't just something confined to our history books because stories like this regularly appear in tabloids these days. I was shocked to read that apparently 1 out of 3 women worldwide having been raped or sexually assaulted (World Bank 2005) and conservative figures suggest that there are at least 50,000 women raped yearly in the UK. Sadly it is a live issue still, but in many ways this passage is unique and I think there are things that we can usefully learn from it.

Starting at the beginning of the chapter we find Amnon, one of David's sons, is in love with his half sister, Tamar, and wants to sleep with her, but is unable to because she is his half sister. He is distraught until Jonadab, Amnon's cousin, arrives on the scene and comes up with a plan for Amnon to achieve what he wants. Amnon carries the plan out, and it works just as predicted, resulting in Amnon spending time alone with Tamar. Once alone Amnon's true feelings come out. He grabs hold of Tamar, urging her to lie with him, but she resists. She states the reason that Amnon's request is so wrong as it is a violation of her, and also wouldn't be in Amnon's interest either because raping her would make him like one of the wicked fools in Israel. When she sees that Amnon isn't listening to her, she makes one final plea for Amnon to speak to the king about the possible marriage. I do not think she wants to marry Amnon, but marriage is better than rape and dishonour. But it doesn't work. Amnon is determined to sleep with Tamar then and there. If she will not do so voluntarily, then she will do so anyway. Amnon is bigger and stronger and does what he wants to. But it is striking that in the very next verse we find a complete reversal in Amnon's feelings towards Tamar – from intense and unbearable attraction to intense hatred in v15. He cannot stand the sight of this woman he has violated and so orders her out. Once again, Tamar resists. She protests that however evil Amnon has been in raping her, he is even more wicked in casting her off, but once again, Amnon will not listen. Instead he orders his servant to throw her out and to lock the door behind her. The servant obeys, and Tamar leaves the house, having torn her long-sleeved garment and put ashes on her head.

One of those who learn what happened is Absalom, Tamar's brother, but he surprisingly does nothing, or so it seems. In contrast when David heard about all these things, v21 **'he was very angry.'** That's good, it is the right reaction to this injustice. But the problem was that was all, he didn't do anything about it, even though it was his responsibility as King. We don't know why, possibly because he found it too hard to call Amnon to account when he himself had violated Bathsheba, but the bottom line is that he was without excuse. The next two years pass and seemingly all has been forgotten, with Amnon appearing to get away with his crime. But that isn't the case, Absalom had been waiting for an opportune time to get revenge, and here it is. Sheep-sheering time arrives and Absalom is able to manufacture Amnon's attendance to his celebration at Baal-Hazor. Absalom then arranges for his servants to murder Amnon when he is sufficiently drunk, and is willing to take full responsibility for the murder. So they murder him and as a result the rest of David's sons are terrified for their lives and so flee back towards Jerusalem, where David is found mourning the death of Amnon. So the chapter ends on a sad note with Amnon having been killed and with Absalom having fled the country.

I wonder what you make of it. Just imagine for a moment how you would have felt if you were one of the citizens of Israel at this time? My guess is that we would be very discouraged because it is a desperately sad situation with rape and murder within a family, and what makes it worse is that it wasn't just any old family. Instead it's in the king's family, the one who was meant to set an example and lead Israel, and not just any king, but one of the greatest kings Israel ever had. So people understandably at the time would probably have thought that there was no hope for the future with such a corrupt leadership in the country. They may even have questioned where is God in the mess? Because did you notice that God wasn't even mentioned in this chapter, where is He? The truth is that God is acting in judgement on David's sin with Bathsheba. You may remember from last week in Chapter 12:10 that Nathan told David what God said, that ***'the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'*** So the murder in Chapter 13, followed by several more murders over the next few chapters are a punishment to David's family for the sin that David committed.

And I think one of the main points of these chapters is to help us realise the seriousness of sin. We saw that clearly two weeks ago where we were reminded that evil is evil and it matters to Almighty God. It's very easy for us to downplay the seriousness of sin and focus on the fact that God is a forgiving God, which is true as we saw for example in Chapter 12:13 where God forgave David for his sin with Bathsheba. But what we need to do is hold both aspects at the same time, that God is a forgiving God and also that God is a holy God who hates sin, which I think is something we so easily ignore as we try and sweep our sins under the carpet. It's easy for us to think it doesn't matter what we do if others don't see it and we get away with it, but the truth is that sin is serious and God hates it. Along with the main point of the seriousness of sin I think there are other important truths that we can get out of this chapter by looking at some of the main characters involved. It is hard to know how much we can apply from it because it was in very different circumstances to ours, but I think we can learn some principles of how we shouldn't live. So the plan for the rest of the sermon is to think about some of the main characters that appear in this Chapter. So firstly:

Amnon: Gave into Temptation

He was a man who lusted after his half sister and who became frustrated to the point of illness because he couldn't sleep with her. Instead of resisting the temptation he is happy to do whatever it takes to get what he wants and so ends up lying, deceiving and in the end raping. It is such a sad turn of events, especially when in the previous two chapters we have seen his Father, David, commit similar sins against Bathsheba and then hear the consequences of it in Chapter 12. But Amnon doesn't learn from it.

At first sight there doesn't seem like there is much for us to learn from Amnon's example as we know how wrong rape is. But I think there is more to learn from Amnon. I think the big question is how will we respond to temptations? For each of us it will be different things, it could be greed, career, reputation, relationships or maybe something else. The question is will we be like Amnon and do whatever it takes to achieve what we want, even if it involves sinning. Are we willing to put others down, to lie, to steal, to be ungodly in order to achieve it? It is a very slippery slope as I doubt when Amnon first fell in love with his sister he didn't expect it to end in rape, but so often it starts with something small and then gets more and more serious, to the extent that it dominates over what is right. This is what happened to Amnon, when Tamar tried explaining to him how detestable and inappropriate rape is he just ignores her. By then he had in mind what he wanted to do and nothing would stop him, and it would take another 7 years to live through the consequences of that one action. But just think how different this story would have been, and in fact the rest of Israel's history, if Amnon

had resisted his temptation. How are we going to respond to temptations? Because it is so easy to give into them, at least partially as it achieves something we want, but before we know it has taken over more than we expected, and often with worse consequences. The key is to fight the temptation from the start. From my experience this is something much easier said than done, which is why I've tried to remember some verses to help me when I'm tempted. Verses like 1 Corinthians 10:13 **'And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.'** Christians are no longer slaves to sin thanks to Jesus' death on the cross and so we don't need to give into the temptation. Or how about Hebrews 4:15 which says **'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are – yet was without sin.'** It's a great encouragement for me to pray more because Jesus knows what I am going through. So that's Amnon, and the problem with him was that he gave into temptation.

Jonadab: Ungodly advice

Next is Jonadab. He was Amnon's cousin and was a very wise man, who after hearing Amnon's passion for Tamar suggest a plan for Amnon to fulfil his desires. He knows how to make things succeed, even the rape of a cousin. And in some ways I think he is the most dangerous man in this whole fiasco because he is a gifted man who has wisdom without ethics. He is able to get what he wants, but the problem is he doesn't have principles. It reminds me of the story of the vicar of Bray, who was a Catholic under King Henry 8th, Protestant under King Edward 6, Catholic again under Queen Mary, then a Protestant in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. When some criticised him of bringing shame and scandal to his calling he replied, "I cannot help that! If I changed my religion, I am sure I keep true to my principle, which is, to live and die vicar of Bray." That is like Jonadab; whose focus isn't on doing the right thing, but rather on doing things that will help his reputation. So he advises Amnon how to get what he wants, then he does nothing about Absalom's plan to kill Amnon (I think probably because challenging Absalom wouldn't have benefited Jonadab's position). Finally near the end of the chapter he tries getting closer to David by consoling David after Amnon's death. And I think the challenge for us is what sort of advice do we give people? Are we going to be like Jonadab whose focus is on ourselves and so tell people what they want to hear and ways to achieve it in order to improve our reputation? How about if they want to do something ungodly? Will we go along with them, or will we challenge them about it? It's much easier to tell them what they want to hear, but it is important that we tell them biblical advice as it is the truth and will lead to the best way to live. Or looking at it from the opposite side what sort of friends do we listen to? People who tell us what we want to hear, or people who are willing to challenge us if we want to do something ungodly? For Amnon, he unwisely took Jonadab's ungodly advice, rather than Tamar's godly advice, and look at the consequences. We need to be people who give and who listen to godly advice.

Absalom: Sinful Revenge

Finally Absalom. I wonder what you make of him. When he first hears what Amnon has done of Tamar, v20, he said **'Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart.'** Isn't that ironic because we learn later on in the chapter from Jonadab that Absalom's expressed intention from that day was to take revenge and kill Amnon. He should have tried to find a way to resolve the conflict, which under Jewish Law would have been that Amnon should marry Tamar (Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Instead V22 tells us that **"Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because**

he had disgraced his sister Tamar.” Absalom took it to heart for two years before he found a way to achieve what he wanted. He took the law into his own hands, which resulted in murdering his brother and Absalom becoming a fugitive. And I think the warning for us is how do we respond when people sin against us, or those we love? Do we like Absalom keep it in us and wait for an opportunity to get revenge? Or we are willing to forgive them, even when it’s hard? We are taught in Colossians 3:13 that we should **‘Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against each one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.’** Our motivation to forgive is because of what Jesus has already done for us. And as for the injustice that they have caused it is not for us to take revenge because we are taught in Romans 12:19 **‘Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay”, says the Lord.’** God is our just heavenly father and so we should leave it to God to judge instead of taking it into our own hands. Just think how differently things could have been if Absalom had forgiven Amnon and left it to God to judge.

So there are lots of moral principles that we learn from these people, but I don’t want them to be the main focus of what we remember from this chapter because I think there is a bigger theme for us to remember, and that is that despite human sin God is faithful to his promises. This chapter has exposed a very sad episode of Israel’s history, with the main characters left raped, murdered, mourning and in exile. If I was God I would just give up with them, and start again with a different family who listened and obeyed me, especially seeing that the David and Bathsheba incident happened just 2 chapters earlier. But thankfully God isn’t like that as he despite human sin he is faithful to his promises, and so doesn’t just give up with David’s family. and the reason is as you may remember back in Chapter 7 that God made a promise to David that David’s kingdom would endure for ever. And that is fulfilled in Jesus, the perfect king who died for us. So when we give into temptation like Amnon, when we give/accept ungodly advice like with Jonadab, when we commit sinful revenge like Absalom, or sin in a whole multitude of other ways. When we feel unworthy we should hold firm to the cross and remember the wonderful truth that God is a faithful God despite the unfaithfulness of his people. We should remember his promises, that whoever believes in Jesus’ death will be saved (Romans 10:13), that nothing can separate Christians from God’s love (Romans 8:38) and many more promises in the Bible. Let’s remember God’s promises, and rejoice in them as it gives us wonderful hope for the future, knowing that even though we are sinful God is faithful to his promises.

Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)