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2 Samuel 13

5th Message

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FAMILY MATTERS: THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

SERIES: A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

I. Introduction: After Forgiveness Then What?

After his treacherous sins of adultery and murder, David threw himself upon the mercy of God not only to be forgiven, but also to be restored with a clean heart to be made fully human again. How does a repentant sinner become restored in a community of faith? What is the process of restoration? Does forgiveness imply that a wronged party must extend immediate trust or renew covenant bonds, as in a marriage? Does mercy demand immediate reinstatement to leadership? Does forgiveness mean that God is going to alleviate consequences or mitigate them in some way? Or do the consequences of our sins have a necessary, healing role to play in our restoration? These are complex and controversial issues, and demand mature and humble responses. Our text today will shed some needed light to help us negotiate our way through these difficult waters.

A. God's mercy trumps his justice

"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." (Prov 28:13 ESV)

Because David made a full and complete confession of his sin in Psalm 51 he obtained mercy from God.

[Psalm 51 written]¹

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. (1 Sam 12:13)

As Bruce Waltke writes,

David confesses his sin and repents, and although justice demands he be put to death, God's mercy is greater than his justice. God nullifies the death sentence the king pronounces against himself. Out of his abounding love, grace and mercy (Ps 51:1; cf. Exod 34:6), God forgives David so that sinners will know he is the God of grace, not wrath, and be turned back to God (Ps 51:13).²

If God forgives an individual, we must also forgive, for he was the one who was ultimately wronged (Ps 51:4), and a servant rises or falls by the word of the Lord, not ours. To refuse to forgive someone who has wronged you places you in the precarious position of usurping God's rightful role as judge, and to maintain a hard heart calls into question your status as a believer. In the words of Jesus, "if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:15).

B. Forgiveness does not imply we escape consequences

But being forgiven doesn't imply that David will escape the consequences of his sin. As Moses wrote in the book of Numbers,

The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Num 14:18)

In David's case, his sin had a national dimension, and because he despised God's word, God disciplined him in full view of the nations with the death of the child born from his illicit union with Bathsheba.

Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die." (v. 14)

Furthermore, because of his unlawful use of the sword against his friend Uriah, God testified, "the sword will never depart from your house" (v. 10). Such words cut to the core and make us gasp. They are first played out in the violent deaths of the first three successors to David's throne (Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah), but it doesn't end there. David's violent deeds sow destructive seeds that will subject the nation to an enduring civil war and her ultimate exile.

David's life will be played out before him in the mirror of his spoiled sons, who take on the sins of their father with flagrant zest and zeal, doing in public what their father did in private. Through the lives of his sons the voice of God will break through louder, and the excruciating images of his sins burn deeper than ever before. The inescapable sorrow will be the tool that reshapes and makes David's heart whole once again. This is the answer to David's prayer to be restored and remade in the God's image, so that he might love the Lord again with his whole heart (Ps 51:10-12). The road to restoration is long, painful and arduous. At first David will fight against it with rage, resignation and isolation. But at the core David is a man after God's own heart, and ultimately he will submit and by faith embrace the sorrow and humiliation to be transformed by it. His first valley of deep darkness comes when he pleads to God for the life of his newborn son.

C. Grace has the last word (2 Sam 12:15-25)

Nathan's confrontation re-awakens David to the reality of God and the insidious, deceptive ways of sin. David, the model of prayer, throws himself at God's feet, praying that his son might be healed. Eugene Peterson observes that, "It is a prayer soaked in repentance for his sin, it is a prayer undergirded and intensified with seven nights of fasting; it is a prayer supported by 'the elders.' And the child dies."³ Remarkably, when the Lord does not answer his prayer, David gets up and worships the God he loves and returns to his new wife with a devout compassion and tenderness he did not have when he had previously used her. "The 'answer' to David's prayer is his rehabilitation into a person capable of humble prayer before God and tender love for others."⁴

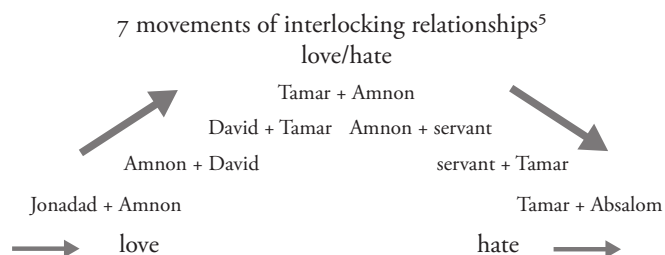
But judgment is not the last word. Out of his unspeakable generosity, God gives Bathsheba another son, and to make sure there was no lingering cloud of shame or guilt hovering over his birth, God sent the prophet Nathan to announce his absolute delight in the child. God's message of hope and love was compressed into the boy's name, Jedidiah, a derivative of David's name – "Beloved of the Lord." The name will serve as a crucial touchstone of God's relentless love and grace that will buoy David with hope during the turbulent times that will follow.

We would be wise to do likewise and celebrate when God visits repentant sinners with signs of new life. As Paul commands, "Rejoice

with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). To stand aloof and distant when God is restoring sinners with a renewed sense of their identity and joy is to place yourself outside God’s party. Like the older brother in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, we bring public humiliation to the generosity and grace of the heavenly Father. And if we are tempted to think that the individual hasn’t suffered enough or that he or she will never change, the text reminds us that transformation is God’s business and he is THE master of it.

II. A Daughter Violated (2 Sam 13:1-17)

The first installment of Nathan’s prophesied consequences is the account of the rape of David’s beautiful daughter, Tamar, by her half-brother, Amnon. This is not the first rape that touches the heart of God’s emerging family. Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, suffered a similar fate that brought disastrous consequences upon the family. The stories of Scripture teach us that those who follow the King are not immune to betrayal and desecration, just as our Lord was not immune.



The story has seven movements, each of which is portrayed in pairs of interlocking relationships. These seven pairs of relationships ought to be illustrative of family loyalty, care and protection, but instead, they become clasped hands in a labyrinth of seduction. One broken link in this chain could have prevented the disaster, but tragically, every link only serves to aid in the seduction and rape of the princess of Israel. This ancient tale of tragic proportions sadly has become all too familiar in our modern world. The one who will feel the weight of this tragedy is David, as Amnon’s rape exposes the hidden violence of his adultery.

A. A sister caught between two brothers (vv. 1-2)

Now Absalom, David’s son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. And after a time Amnon, David’s son, loved her. And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. (vv. 1-2)

In verse one we are introduced to three players in the royal family: Absalom, Tamar and Amnon. The two brothers frame the verse; their beautiful sister, Tamar, is caught in the middle. Amnon was the eldest son of David by Ahinoam, the Jezreelitess; Absalom was the handsome third son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. The meaning of their names, “faithfulness” (Amnon) and “father of peace” (Absalom), sting us with the painful irony of the rape and murder that will follow.

As the scene opens, Amnon, is lovesick for his half-sister, Tamar. Amnon has fed and nurtured his lust until it has become an obsession. Surprisingly, the obstacle to his all-consuming lust is not his father, but Tamar’s brother, Absalom. The fact that Absalom is the prominent figure in the text, suggests that David has slipped from his place of prominence into isolation and passivity, and that his handsome son has already emerged as a potential successor to the throne. With lust burning within and Israel’s laws preventing him, Amnon sees no way out of his quandary. But, as if in answer to Amnon’s prayers, his shrewd cousin Jonadab enters onto the stage.

B. A corrupt cousin (vv. 3-5)

But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David’s brother. And Jonadab was a very crafty man. And he said to him, “O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?” Amnon said to him, “I love Tamar, my brother Absalom’s sister.” Jonadab said to him, “Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill. And when your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘Let my sister Tamar come and give me bread to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand.’” (vv. 3-5)

Jonadab was the son of David’s older brother, Shimeah, and Amnon’s close friend. Seven Hebrew words form the line that introduces Jonadab. Of the seven, six resonate with covenantal loyalty: “faithfulness,” “intimate friend,” “he is willing,” “son of obedience,” “brother,” and “beloved.” Yet what follows makes a mockery of all the holy standards of loyal-love that hold the fabric of families together. With deceptive skill Jonadab breaks through all the obstacles and conspires to use David as a pawn to consummate his cousin’s lusts. In our day Jonadab would be filthy rich selling pornography to young men.

C. A father turns a blind eye (vv. 6-7)

So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. And when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, “Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand.” Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, “Go to your brother Amnon’s house and prepare food for him.” (vv. 6-7)

Addressing his father, Amnon makes a subtle allusion to his sexual passions: both the verb “to make” and the noun “cakes” come from the same Hebrew root as the word “heart.” Fokkelman translates it as, “Let her knead two heart-cakes.”⁶ The verb is used for a ravished heart in the Song of Songs:

**You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride;
You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes.” (Songs 4:9)**

The dual image of the “beating heart” reveals Amnon’s secret obsession. But David, who has never denied his son any request, turns a deaf ear to what he hears and does not take time to probe the truth underlying the image. When he passes on the request to Tamar, he removes the sexual overtones and delivers the message in its bare essentials— a sister’s duty to her ailing brother.

D. A sordid seduction (vv. 8-11)

So Tamar went to her brother Amnon’s house, where he was lying down. And she took dough and kneaded it and made cakes in his sight and baked the cakes. And she took the pan and emptied it out before him, but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, “Send out everyone from me.” So everyone went out from him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food into the chamber, that I may eat from your hand.” And Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, “Come, lie with me, my sister.” (vv. 8-11)

Tamar enters her brother’s house unaware of the trap that has been set. As the princess innocently and affectionately prepares the meal, sexual tension grows as Amnon watches the object of his desire kneading dough. We look on shocked by the ugly undertones of Amnon’s love-starved imagination. The sight of his sister’s delicate frame feeds his sensual appetites beyond control, and he orders everyone out of the room so that he can carry out his secret desire. He invites Tamar into the intimate chamber of his bedroom, and greets her with the base

request, “Come, lie with me, my sister”—words which should not even be uttered in the same sentence. A horrified Tamar objects forcefully and soundly.

E. Tamar’s courageous refusal (vv. 12-13)

She answered him, “No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the outrageous fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.” (vv. 12-13)

Tamar’s objections and plea to Amnon are most honorable, articulate and logical. They speak of the dignity with which she holds herself and the holy standards of God’s laws in Israel, which set Israel apart from the sexual practices of her Canaanite neighbors. She counters Amnon’s lust with a logic that presses her brother to consider a future that will be inescapably shaped by his present choices. As for herself, to lose her virginity would mark her forever and sentence her to a life of isolated shame. Who would condescend to pay the price of her dowry? As for Amnon, he would be labeled the worst kind of “fool” in all Israel (Heb: *nabal* is reminiscent of the Nabal story). It is a dangerous omen, foreshadowing his violent and certain death. Tamar proposes marriage as an alternative, intimating that David withholds nothing from his favored son. Her last plea is really an attempt to buy time, for Israel’s law prohibited such a union (Lev 18:9; 20:17; Deut 27:22). But sadly, lust favors no patience or propriety, only instant gratification.

F. Brother turned rapist (vv. 14-15)

But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, “Get up! Go!” (vv. 14-15)

As Fokkelman observes, Amnon has grown up to be just like his father.

Once he has seen, he is lost, just like his father in 11:2...the spoiled prince who is constantly served at his every whim...cannot cope with Tamar’s refusal to his request...and blazes away in an act of love which is through and through aggression...[Then] he ruthlessly degrades Tamar to an object of desire, a total dehumanization which leaves someone behind as a ruin.⁷

G. Rape escalates to expulsion (vv. 16-17)

But she said to him, “No, my brother, for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.” But he would not listen to her. He called the young man who served him and said, “Put this [woman] out of my presence and bolt the door after her!” (vv. 16-17)

Tamar’s vehement resistance causes Amnon to immediately drop his affectionate address of “my sister,” revealing his true colors as an abuser who uses and then disposes his victims. Tamar no longer has a name, she is reduced to a mere pronoun, “this.”

I have often wondered why acts of sexual abuse more often than not escalate to even greater violence, especially murder. Reflecting on this text, I suspect that the face of the violated victim becomes a mirror of the abuser’s depravity and a penetrating reminder of the desecration he is capable of. But the perpetrator cannot stomach staring at the truth, so he throws her out with merciless bluntness. Refusing even to pronounce her name, he slams the door behind her in the vain hope of never seeing her again. God views rape as such a violent attack upon his image that in Israel it was punishable by death (Deut 22:25). In

our culture, women seldom receive justice for the crimes committed against them.

III. Public Protest and Private Rage (2 Sam 13:18-22)

A. Tamar’s public protest (vv. 18-19)

Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves, for thus were the virgin daughters of the king dressed. So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. And Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she wore. And she laid her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went. (vv. 18-19)

Perhaps Amnon thinks that Tamar, like Bathsheba, will keep what happened behind closed doors a secret. But Tamar will not conspire in a cover up; she has more dignity and courage than Bathsheba. As Brueggemann observes, “As she was not taken in by his desire, so she is not immobilized by his hate.”⁸ She makes public what Amnon did in private in order to bring some semblance of honor to her violated soul. She tears her beautiful robe, a symbol of her royal worth, to testify to the violent loss of her virginity as a public indictment against Amnon. Tamar, a very visible person in the royal court, exposes her shame openly, boldly and forcefully.

This is a very important step in the healing process. Society would prefer its victims to keep silent and out of sight, but brave Tamar will have none of it. In the wake of the horror comes Tamar’s penetrating cry to awaken us, and the tearing of her robe to haunt us. The consequence for her is not just an unwanted pregnancy, or AIDS, but something far worse: Tamar lost her purity, her virginity, her dignity; in short her very personhood.

B. Absalom’s private rage (vv. 20-22)

And her brother Absalom said to her, “Has Amnon your brother been with you? Now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this to heart.” So Tamar lived, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom’s house. When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry. But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad, for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar. (vv. 20-22)

Absalom discerns instantly what went on behind closed doors. He tells Tamar, rather bluntly, to remain quiet — “do not take the matter to heart.” This is a painful echo of David’s words in 2 Samuel 11:25, following the arranged death of Uriah. Fokkelman suggests that Absalom is warning her that taking legal action against Amnon would be difficult, because Amnon “is a prince and is much beloved by his father.”⁹ Perhaps Absalom wishes to prevent the royal family from being exposed to a formal lawsuit and the national scandal that would result, and to spare Tamar the misery and humiliation that would involve. Absalom will take her rage on himself. He will care for his violated sister in his own way, permanently.

When David finally gets wind of what went on in his own household, he is enraged, but we are not told at whom. Is he furious at Amnon, his lustful son? Or is he angry because he was duped and taken in by his nephew? Or is he infuriated at himself for his naiveté and not seeing through Amnon’s request. I would suggest David is angry because his son has grown up to be just like his father, and he is forced to feel the depth of pain God felt when he took Bathsheba. So what will David do? Will he respond like the Lord and boldly confront the abuser with the truth of his crimes? And if he refuses to repent, will he carry out a death sentence on his favorite son?

Sadly, David is so compromised by his past sins he is powerless to do anything. When the violated princess looks to her father for help,

there will be no investigation, no inquiry, no charges pressed, no legal proceedings, and no justice—just anger with no action.

But if David is passive, his son and possible successor, Absalom, is not. His response to the matter is to publicly excommunicate his brother in a rage of silence, a rage that will brew and fester into a methodical and passionate revenge. Fueled by a burning hatred, Absalom's rage will move with relentless force until the wrong done to his sister is paid in full with nothing less than Amnon's blood. That will be our story for next week.

IV. The Sins of the Fathers

There is much that we can learn from this story. On one level, it is a painful portrait of our own culture, where the sexual sins of my generation are being acted out with increasing intensity by the second, third and fourth generations. Jonadab still speaks his craft and is everywhere aggressively marketing every tool imaginable to feed our sexual cravings, assuring us that there is no danger in these indulgences. Just place a condom over the whole affair for easy protection. But, as Amnon well illustrates, when you feed your lusts rather than satisfying your soul, your cravings become uncontrollable and bestial. "Safe" sex quickly turns abusive and violent. No longer satisfied with date rape, Amnon now invites his friends to join in a gang rape. As the grip of idolatry escalates through the generations, God is calling out to the parents and grandparents, reshaping our affections to hate the sins we committed, through the grief of the ones we love the most: our children.

For David, he will see his life reflected in the mirror of his children for the rest of his life. This is God's answer to his prayer for restoration in Psalm 51. And though he is initially so angry and refuses to look, I suspect God may have had a few well-chosen words for David when he was alone on his bed that night. (Perhaps quoting one of David's psalms! "Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent" Ps 4:4 TNIV).

Look at your son, David,
what do you see?
A prince, a future king,
or fool to lust?
That was you, David.
And you, a king, used like a pawn,
for someone else's private jest,
the court joker in a game of secret seduction,
your royal touch, its faithful service
servicing his untamed lusts.
How does it feel David?
That was you, David.

Look at your daughter, David,
beautiful Tamar, succulent palm tree,
princess in Israel.
What do you see, David?
Innocence gone, seized in a moment,
royal robe rent in violent song.

She's crying David.
Are you angry that she cries?
Would you rather she keep silent, David?
She is crying for you,
she wants her father, David.
She is crying for justice.

Where are you, David?
Why can't you hold her?
Why do you look away, David?
Does that gaping wound of desolation
stare bloody back at you?

Why are you angry, David?
Is it because you could have, but didn't,
your once quick, decisive hand
that played the harp,
seized the spear and shot the sling,
now frozen in silence, paralyzed
by sins' deafening blows.

Why are you weeping, David,
an absent father now purged tender,
by a daughter's inconsolable grief?

That is how I felt, David,
plagued by pain, unable to reach
my daughter, whom you touched.

So weep your weary eyes dry, David;
for today, Tamar, your daughter,
has made you a father.
I love you, David.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

1 In his unpublished notes on Psalm 51 Bruce Waltke writes that "A Qumran scroll of Samuel has a blank space at the end of 2 Sam 12:12 which, according to S. Talmon, directed the reader to Psalm 51."

2 Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology, an Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 665.

3 Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (WBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 187.

4 Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 187.

5 Diagram is taken from J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 1, King David* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 102.

6 Fokkelman, *King David*, 105.

7 Fokkelman, *King David*, 106-107.

8 Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 288.

9 Fokkelman, *King David*, III.