

## Redemptive Failure | Fall and Rise of the House of David

### Domestic Disturbance

Second Samuel 13 (vv. 17ff)

8.28.22

*Then he called his young man who attended him and said, "Now throw this woman out of my presence, and lock the door behind her." <sup>18</sup> Now she had on a long-sleeved garment; for in this manner the virgin daughters of the king dressed themselves in robes. Then his attendant took her out and locked the door behind her. <sup>19</sup> Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her long-sleeved garment which was on her; and she put her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went.*

*<sup>20</sup> Then Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now keep silent, my sister, he is your brother; do not take this matter to heart." So Tamar remained and was desolate in her brother Absalom's house.*

*<sup>21</sup> Now when King David heard of all these matters, he was very angry. <sup>22</sup> But Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar.*

*<sup>23</sup> Now it came about after two full years that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons.*

*<sup>24</sup> Absalom came to the king and said, "Behold now, your servant has sheepshearers; please let the king and his servants go with your servant." <sup>25</sup> But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, we should not all go, for we will be burdensome to you." Although he urged him, he would not go, but blessed him. <sup>26</sup> Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." And the king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" <sup>27</sup> But when Absalom urged him, he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.*

*<sup>28</sup> Absalom commanded his servants, saying, "See now, when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then put him to death. Do not fear; have not I myself commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant." <sup>29</sup> The servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose and each mounted his mule and fled.*

*<sup>30</sup> Now it was while they were on the way that the report came to David, saying, "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons, and not one of them is left." <sup>31</sup> Then the king arose, tore his clothes and lay on the ground; and all his servants were standing by with clothes torn. <sup>32</sup> Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother, responded, "Do not let my lord suppose they have put to death all the young men, the king's sons, for Amnon alone is dead; because by the intent of Absalom this has been determined since the day that he violated his sister Tamar. <sup>33</sup> "Now therefore, do not let my lord the king take the report to heart, namely, 'all the king's sons are dead,' for only Amnon is dead."*

*<sup>34</sup> Now Absalom had fled. And the young man who was the watchman raised his eyes and looked, and behold, many people were coming from the road behind him by the side of the mountain. <sup>35</sup> Jonadab said to the king, "Behold, the king's sons have come; according to your servant's word, so it happened." <sup>36</sup> As soon as he had finished speaking, behold, the king's sons came and lifted their voices and wept; and also the king and all his servants wept very bitterly.*

<sup>37</sup> Now Absalom fled and went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day. <sup>38</sup> So Absalom had fled and gone to Geshur, and was there three years. <sup>39</sup> The heart of King David longed to go out to Absalom; for he was comforted concerning Amnon, since he was dead.

Last week we returned to the life of King David, about 1000 BC... We picked up where we left off last year, but this is really a new phase in David's life. He's sinned in a very premeditated and deliberate way. Israel's unique king had become like other kings in the Ancient Near East; David's is misrepresenting God, the True King. David has taken another man's wife (a much younger friend of the family) and when she became pregnant, David covered it up by murdering her husband.

Now David is facing the specific consequences of his sins, as announced by the Prophet Nathan. David's forgiven but he will suffer a fourfold loss of what he's inflicted; four of David's children will meet violence. The sword will not depart from his house (strife!)

Today we witness the violence done to two more of King David's children: the firstborn, Prince Amnon, violates his half-sister, Princess Tamar and that sin is avenged when Prince Absalom kills Amnon at a family gathering.

The chapter is full of sensitive topics, so I'll offer a kind of trigger-warning before we delve into it – it involves domestic and sexual violence, incest, murder and parental estrangement. If those topics are too painful for you – we'll understand if you need to be excused OR if you need to talk to someone about these things, we can perhaps recommend someone for you.

As Peterson says, "The narrator of the story refuses to idealize David (or his family), to set him above our common humanity in any way." So, we'll try to deal sensitively with the passage. But it does help us to face our craving for revenge when I or someone I love is brutalized or abused... Do we just sit back and wish for the "sweet by and by"? Are we allowed to seek justice ...seek retribution... be a whistle-blower?

Today: the Gospel and the desire to see people pay for their crimes: 1) Anger in a Vacuum 2) Apathy and Vigilantism 3) Assurance of Ultimate Vengeance

We've probably all watched movies that exploit our universal desire to get revenge or see the bad-guy get what's coming to him. I'm thinking of the thrill we all feel when the good-guy says something like, "*I don't know who you are. I don't know what you want. If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don't have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills...*" (Taken, 2008)

We love those movies, revenge-movies, because we want to see the abuser get ABUSED. We detest the arrogance of a person who thinks he/she owns other people and can do whatever he/she wants with a total disregard for the life or feelings of the victim. AND we know that too often... people get away with crimes.

Amnon had become obsessed with his half-sister (whom he calls Absalom's sister (which is true but also Amnon's half-sister = incest!), and he tells his cousin (Jonadab) that he can't stop thinking about her because he loves her. But, of course, it's not love; it's arrogance and greed.

And when he's done with her, he immediately began to hate her. Maybe she reminded him of how evil he was so he couldn't stand to look at her. And he crudely says the exact opposite of what he'd first said, "Come, be with me" and THEN, "Go away from me." And she weeps, "THIS injury is even worse than the first!" Because she'll never recover her dignity and will live as a pariah all her days. He tells his assistant/valet "throw this one out of my presence and lock the door!" (17)

And when Absalom (Tamar's full brother) learned of this hideous act, he comforts her and says in effect, "Leave this to me." And she remained desolate or alone (LXX) all her life. We never hear of Tamar again except that later Absalom names his daughter after her.

Meanwhile David learns of this crime committed by his firstborn son against his own daughter. And it says, "he was very angry..." a-a-a--a---a-and nothin'" He just got angry "but boy oh boy was he angry!". But that's it. The LXX (Grk version of the Hebrew Bible) adds "And king David heard of all these things, and was very angry; but he did not offend the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his first-born." (21) And in fairness, that's an interpretation NOT a direct translation but it does seem to accurately read between the lines. David was fixated on keeping his sons on the throne...

AND in this vacuum – David failing to act decisively or at all – the other son, whose name means "my father is peace" Absalom waits... patiently... for justice to be served for his father to act... to DO SOMETHING... Absalom waits two full years for his father to "man-up". Maybe David has a twisted idea that he doesn't want to be a hypocrite... but for two years he does nothing. (But, oh boy! HE IS VERY angry!) My Father is peace...is passive.

And Absalom's hatred for his half-brother simmers... and steams and boils ...And he waits with his particular set of skills...

Now, this problem that men have... this hesitancy to be decisive and instead to be passive is as old as humanity itself. We find it in the first pages of the Bible in Genesis CH 3 where Eve is left to battle temptation by herself and Adam is silent... not standing with his wife.

But it's not so much the Genesis CH 3 story ...but the Genesis CHs 34ff – the story of God's chosen and dysfunctional family, Israel or Jacob and his twelve sons. Jacob showed a similar passivity when his daughter, Dinah, was violated by a Canaanite man. In the wake of that passivity and people-pleasing, Jacob's sons annihilated an entire village (Gen 34).

Later, there was a Tamar (app 800 yrs before this) who was promised a husband but due to the passivity of Jacob's fourth son, Judah, she never got a husband... so in utter desperation she tricked Judah and got herself twin boys to care for her in her old age in that wild, dangerous time where women were so vulnerable.

There are so many literary connections to the whole Jacob and Joseph story, and I don't want to bore you except to point out one. In today's text, the abused, Tamar leaves her abuser it notes that she wore a "long-sleeved garment" and then tore that "long-sleeved garment" in an act of mourning and shame.

That phrase is used at only two places in the Bible – here and in Genesis where Joseph wears a garment described in exactly that phrase usually translated (probably wrongly) as a coat of many colors.

Now why do I belabor this connection? It's because the narrator has seen a pattern etched into the sinful hearts of God's people and here it is again: failure to act and address family ills and societal evils and crimes in the church leads to deep anger. Passivity to address a lack of justice leads to simmering anger that eventually expresses itself in vigilantism – people become vigilantes in the face of sinful inactivity and passivism.

Remember Eli and the start of First Samuel. His sons abused women and he did not correct them and that passivity led to anger and incredible destruction: they lost the Ark.

Today's passage finds King David who used to send people here and there and take from the people – now at the other extreme. He's manipulated and unwittingly used by Amnon (he got his dad to send Tamar help her half-brother on his sick bed) and then again by Absalom who tricked David into sending Amnon to the sheepshearing party where he was murdered.

David passively makes a lame excuse for not going to the family barbecue.

At the very end of the text, David longs to go out to Absalom in exile... but his pride makes him passive, and it'll lead to more anger (as we'll see).

It's a pattern: passivity in the face of injustice creates a vacuum that is filled by anger and that expresses itself in vigilantism. This is how Ecclesiastes put it: "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong". ( 8:11 NIV)

And when inactivity and inertia and passivity in the face of injustice finally comes out by a self-proclaimed posse, that vigilantism is never good. We see it vividly in today's passage. The vigilantes become (as in the French Revolution) become judge, jury and executioner. And since all people are sinful, the judgments of the vigilantes always lead to greater injustice.

But there was One vigilante who did it right and did it differently. Do you know the definition of vigilante? The popular definition is, "any person who takes the law into his or her own hands, as by avenging a crime."

And if there was One Person who talk the Law into His own... nail-scarred hands it was Jesus Christ.

He opposed that passivity of His day among those in power who simply USED their power to preserve their place and advantages in the church and in society. He got angry at them and He turned over their tables, even while He was loving them (Mark 10.21).

He spoke directly to their ills (Matt 23) but somehow, He followed the Psalm “be angry and sin not” (Ps 4.4; Eph 4.26). And while His anger and love (Zeal is a mixture of anger and love” Thomas Watson) His anger and love DID indeed express itself in vigilantism and violence – it was His own blood that was spilled. He took to Himself the justice I deserved. He was punished in my place.

He took the Law into His own hands. He lived according to every detail of God’s holy law. He loved God and loved people without interruption, completely. He took the Law that I was supposed to live by, He took THAT LAW into His own beautiful and powerful hands and obeyed IN MY PLACE.

He lived to fulfill the Law for me (Gal 4.4), and He died to satisfy the justice I had incurred by my disobedience, my failures and my wickedness (our hearts are every bit as messed up as David’s – we only lack the opportunity).

His resurrection shows that He was not simply a hothead like Absalom but He is the True Word that “My Father is Peace” – God is not mad at you as long as you are represented by Me – as long as you trust NOT in your own shoddy performance but instead in Mine – you have peace with God: “ having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5.1)

Like the desolate Tamar, we hide in the house of the True Absalom, and He makes us healed, fruitful and embraced.

And if we are trusting in Jesus Christ, we can work for and hope for justice in this life... even though we know it will not be perfect until He returns and makes all things new.

It leads us to stay within the channels – to work as much as we can with the powers He has established like Law Enforcement and the Courts. But also to lift our voices when injustice rears its head. To be neither a passive person NOR an vigilante, hot-head motivated by hate and the lust for revenge.

Listen to how St Peter described this Way of Jesus that grows in us by faith: *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (justice); for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”*

It leads us to have actual conversations with people, to maintain good relational hygiene with one another. Living IN CHRIST, His Spirit moves us to NOT leave difficult things unsaid. It would’ve been great if Absalom and David actually SPOKE!

We know that passivity in the face of abuse is not a good thing. It creates a vacuum that will get filled with anger and lead to the wrong kind of vigilantism.

We live convinced that there WILL BE a final reckoning – a great balancing of the books. All corruption and oppression and sinful domination will either be atoned by His death and resurrection or will be punished on the offender.

When we have to “let it go” (and sometimes that’s all we can do) we do so knowing that we have a Great Defender.

I’ll close this sermon on this dismal episode with one of my all-time favorite quotes. Dostoyevsky from the Brothers K:

*“I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage...that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.”*