

The House Unravels

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[0 : 0 0] There we go. All right. I will be the most wired clergy here before too long. Can I also say to those of you who have not gone through the catechism course that we have here, it's my great desire that every single one of us at some time in the next year or two or three go through the entire catechism course, and not just because my wife helped write it.

Well, now, if you would open your Bibles, please, to 2 Samuel chapter 13 and 14, the passage that was read for us.

And as you turn to it, it's quite clear that this is a very difficult passage today. This is violence, sexual violence inside the family.

And God seems to be almost entirely absent. And what is love, what is called love in the passage is distorted. Justice is distorted. Any form of reconciliation is distorted.

And as the secrets and lies turn to violence and revenge and murder, King David becomes more passive. He seems paralyzed and hardly lifts a finger.

[1 : 2 1] And I think what makes this more difficult is that this is no ordinary family. This is the Messiah of God, the one whom God had chosen to put his spirit on, to make him his chosen king.

And do you remember a couple of chapters ago in chapter 7, God did something he'd never done before. He said, I will make you my son, and from you will come a descendant who will rule on the throne forever.

So we came into the last few chapters with high hopes, didn't we? And our hopes were pretty quickly dashed last week when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah to cover it up.

And things are never the same for David. Adultery and murder cast their shadow into the family and into his children. And as we read this, we have to remember that what's at risk is not just his family, but the promise of God and the very kingdom of God.

And there are three gut-wrenching episodes, two in chapter 13 and one in chapter 14. And I've called the first one for the first half of chapter 13, Love Distorted.

[2 : 3 4] But I want to get the characters straight. So I wonder if you would turn to the bulletin, to the back of the bulletin, to a homemade diagram of David's extended family.

This is my first attempt at a family tree, so don't mock me. But it's important that we get clear whom a fibbleth... Anyway, so there's David's mother and Jesse.

And in the next line, there are two brothers, David and Shimea. And the first thing you notice, on the left of David, I've got a little box called Others. I don't know if you've been tracking carefully.

If you're with us for the first time, you can be forgiven for not noticing. But by now, David has accumulated ten wives. Something God specifically outlawed, but David didn't regard that.

And it may be that some of the seeds of the disaster and chaos that's going on in his family now come from that. However, down at the bottom line, Amnon, this is very important, Amnon is the firstborn son.

[3 : 34] He's the heir to the throne. He's going to be the Messiah. The next is Absalom. There was a son called Chiliad, but I think he's died. And Absalom, who is the half-brother of Amnon, son of a different woman, has a sister called Tamar.

Absalom's full sister, Amnon's half-sister. And there's going to be a quiz as you exit the church today. So we come to the first, I want to read to you again, the first couple of verses in chapter 13.

Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar. And after a time, Amnon, her half-brother, 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, which is exactly what it says in the Hebrew.

This is an ominous opening. The last time we met someone beautiful was Bathsheba. There's an echo of David's sin with Bathsheba. Like Bathsheba, Tamar is beautiful.

[4 : 42] And Amnon thinks that he loves her, but we're told he cannot have what he desires. The one thing he desires is to do something to her. And seeing him tormenting himself with craving, cousin Jonadab comes up with a crafty plan, which involves deceiving and manipulating the king to pimp his daughter to Amnon.

Pretend to be ill. Get Tamar to feed you. David suck it in and he allows it. And when Tamar comes and cooks Amnon breakfast, Amnon orders everyone out, calls her into his own private bedroom, and as soon as she bends down to the bed, he grabs her wrist in a vice-like grip.

And now trapped in verse 11, he tells her exactly what he wants. Listen to Tamar's reply in verse 12. No, my brother, do not violate me, humiliate, rape, for such a thing is not done in Israel.

We're not Canaanites. We have a God we trust who's made himself clear on these things. Do not do this outrageous thing, foolish, godless thing.

As for me, where could I carry my shame? She's moving now to the consequences of what's going to happen. As for you, you would be one of the godless fools in Israel. And then when these arguments don't work, she puts up a Hail Mary.

[6 : 10] Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you. She's very clear-headed. The last argument, of course, is irrelevant. But when you're desperate, you're going to say anything you like.

And she appeals to the king's sexual slackness. He's not going to stop us doing anything. And in verse 14, the action is very fast. And the verbs climb in violence.

He would not listen to her. Being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. And in the Hebrew, the word with is not there. He lay her.

It's humiliating. And it's raw. And it's violent. And it's a horror. And God cares enough to put this before us this morning.

And I just pause for a moment and say sexual assault in any context is devastating. When it's done with inside the circle of the family, it's even more so.

[7 : 12] And this family, which carries the promise of God and the blessing of God, seems inexplicable. And I want to come back to this when we get a bit closer to the end. But I must race on because the story races on.

And the very moment Amnon is finished, he despises Tamar. And he says, when you desire, when you over-desire something, when you get that thing, you hate that thing.

And so for a second time in the passage, he uses force up out, he says. And he has a throne from the room like a piece of trash. But Tamar won't be silent.

She's not going to cover this up. She cries aloud. She covers her head with ash. She tears her cloak. And she runs back to Absalom, her full brother's house, and tells him. And when she gets there, in verse 20, in a piece of advice that is both stupid and evil.

Look what Absalom says, verse 20. Has Amnon, your brother, been with you? Now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother. Do not take it to heart.

[8 : 17] She's just been raped. And Amnon says, keep quiet about it. Don't take it personally. It just compounds the sorrow and desolation.

And I know some of you have had the same experience. I think we ought to just pause here and say that lurking below this is the fact that Absalom is second in line to the throne.

And I think there's a motivation behind Absalom saying to Tamar, don't do anything about this. Because Absalom wants to use Tamar in a different way than Amnon to get to the throne.

What does the king do when he hears about it? We read, he's angry. Does he do anything? No. Does he hold, does he call up Amnon, firstborn son, and hold him accountable?

There's all sorts of provisions in the law. He could send him into exile. Does he bring Tamar and restore her to some sort of public dignity? No. No, he does nothing, verse 21.

[9 : 18] Absolutely nothing. Is it because of his residual guilt over Bathsheba and Uriah? Does he say to himself, well, I'm in no position to give advice or to judge or criticize?

We're not sure. But whatever his motive, he's paralyzed. And it leads to disaster for Tamar and for Amnon and for Absalom, as we'll see next week, for the whole kingdom.

Verse 22, the episode finishes with Absalom seething in rage, working toward revenge. Nothing has been dealt with. And so Absalom decides, I'm going to bring a form of justice of my own.

And that's the first episode, love distorted. Second episode is the second half of chapter 13, and I've called this justice distorted. For two full years now, Absalom broods on revenge and ambition.

Did you know, later on in the passage, we learn that on the day that Tamar was raped, Absalom made a solemn commitment that he would murder Amnon. And he waits patiently, says nothing.

[10 : 27] And the day comes to set the trap. And again, he manipulates the king and he uses the king. He says, I'm going to have a barbecue. I'd like all the king's sons to come, knowing the king won't come.

But he specifically says, I want Amnon to come. And the king thinks it's a bit odd, but he lets them go because the king can no longer say no to his children. And with a number of echoes of David's murder of Uriah in the last chapters, Bathsheba's husband, Absalom gets others to do his dirty work.

He gets Amnon drunk. He gives the order to have him murdered. And he murders him in cold blood. And in one stroke, he clears the way for himself to the throne under the guise of avenging the honour of his sister.

And a garbled message makes its way back to the palace that all the sons of David have been killed by Absalom. And David falls on his face and starts weeping, which is very interesting because he thinks Absalom is well capable of this.

But Jonadab, the crafty cousin, comes up to David and he explains, no, no, no, no, no. He says, Amnon's been going to do this for two years. I mean, if you don't deal with sin, it comes back to bite you.

[11 : 40] And nothing's happened for the last two years. You don't need to worry your royal head. Absalom has taken care of everything. And using exactly the words that Absalom used to Tamar, he says to the king, don't take it to heart.

Which is exactly what David should have done. And so Absalom runs. He runs to his maternal grandfather's little kingdom in Geshur and he lives in exile for three years.

And the last verse of chapter 13, make it sound like David wants Absalom to come back. And I think it's an over-translation. It literally reads, the spirit of the king longed to go out against Absalom.

He wanted to bring some justice, but he didn't do anything. So love is distorted and justice is distorted. And there we come to the third episode, which is chapter 14. And I've called this restoration distorted.

And chapter 14 ends three years later and everything's in a mess. Absalom is still up there in Geshur. David's done nothing. And so along comes Joab, the military commander, the man of action.

[12 : 48] He's got to do something. I don't think Joab does this for any love for David or any love for Absalom. He's a pragmatist, Joab. And he knows that if David should get sick and die, it's going to lead to an almighty fight for the throne.

And Joab's going to be the one who cleans it up. And in the last chapter, Joab saw the effect of Nathan the prophet coming to David and telling a little story. And so he cooks up a plan to copy what Nathan did.

He finds a local actress who can spin a good story. He puts words in her mouth and the poor woman appears before David and she gets out this mangled story about the fact that she had two sons. One accidentally killed the other.

And the tribe wants to take the living son and wreak vengeance on him. Wouldn't it just be better to let bygones be bygones? It's a complete fabrication and David is again being manipulated.

But the manipulation this time is so weak, David sees through it. He says, did Joab put you up to this? She sort of says yes. No, no, it's a true story, she says.

[13 : 54] And David gets the gist. It's stupid that Absalom should be living in exile if he's not going to lift a finger to do anything about it. And so David capitulates grudgingly. He says, okay, okay, bring that rascal back.

Only don't let me see him. Don't let him come into my presence. Which just goes to show that nothing has been dealt with. There's no real restoration. Absalom has not been held accountable for his murder.

Tamar has no justice. Amnon has no justice. And Absalom comes back to Jerusalem to live in this sort of royal limbo for a couple of years. For two years, Absalom lives in his house, not being able to go see the king.

And so he calls Joab on the phone. And Joab won't return his calls. So Absalom does what any spoiled son will do.

He finds a way to get Joab's attention. And the way to get attention is to set your neighbor's field on fire. That's what he does.

[14 : 55] And so if you turn over to verse 32. Verse 31. Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, Why have your servants set my field on fire?

I'm not sure he would have said it in that tone of voice. Absalom's answer, Joab. Behold, I sent word to you. Come here that I may send you to the king to ask, Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.

Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king. If there's guilt in me, let him put me to death. And Joab went to the king and told him. And he summoned Absalom.

So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed him. Absalom is the man of action. He gives Joab, he gives David an ultimatum.

He says, kill me or bring me back into your presence. Which is interesting because he's conscious that his crime should be punishable by death. But he's counting on the fact, he's gambling on the fact that David's not going to act.

[15 : 58] He doesn't have any stomach to act. And so when he's brought before David, it's a very stiff and formal introduction. It's not, dad, I'm so sorry.

It's been five years. David doesn't reach out and say, my son, I should have taken action. No, no, no. On Absalom's side, there's no repentance. On David's side, there's no forgiveness.

So there's no reconciliation. Just a cold, formal standoff. And it becomes the field, the ripe field for mutiny and for civil war in the next passage.

Three episodes. And I want to finish by asking two questions. These are the questions we ought to ask too. The first question is, where is God?

I mean, why is this passage before us in the Bible? I think at one level, it's a very familiar story of a family meltdown.

[16 : 58] Here is a passive father who's been paralyzed by his own sense of guilt and failure, abdicating his role as a father as though he's disqualified from having any opinion about what his kids do, certainly saying he won't say no to his kids.

It's a wonderful and terrifying thing to be a parent, isn't it? And we all know bad parents who have good kids. And we all know good parents who have bad kids.

And there's no one-to-one correspondence, is there? There's no law of nature or law of God where parents get to take credit for the kids' successes and blame for the kids' failures.

Right? Right? But our children inherit more than our genes. They learn all sorts of things from us that we don't hope they learn from us.

And the shape of our own foolishness and the shape of our sin and the shape of the things we love and our insecurities affects and infects our children. It can't be any other way.

[18 : 03] And I think that's why there are such strong echoes in this section of David's own sexual indulgence and abuse of power. But here there is an added layer.

David won't say no to these very privileged children. He's become a doting and sentimental father, a passive father, because of his own sexual lack of self-control and his big attempt to cover it up.

This is the extra layer. These children have grown up with money. They're used to having their needs met. They are the beautiful set. They have all the resources available to them.

They have pedigree and position and palace benefits and they've learned how to get their own way and they don't care who they hurt in the process. They are spoiled.

They have everything except character and the fear of God and it leads to desolation. And I think the combination of their sense of entitlement with a father who will not say no is a very human disaster.

[19 : 10] They become very skilled at manipulating their indulgent father. So he becomes complicit in the rape of Tamar and in the murder of Amnon, his son.

So at one level we see a father who won't say no to his children. And when that happens it creates a moral vacuum, a perfect breeding ground for sexual indulgence and hatred and murder of all kinds.

Because David seems in this section to have swapped the word of God for the word of his children and the results are pretty painful. But where is God? I mean where is God when Amnon violates Tamar or when Absalom murders Amnon?

And if you were with us last week you may remember that what is happening in these chapters is happening according to the word of God. So just if you turn back to chapter 12 for a moment.

This is God speaking through Nathan the prophet in chapter 12.

[20 : 22] He's exposed David's sin. Verse 10. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house because you have despised me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

Thus says the Lord. Behold I will raise evil against you out of your own house. Verse 13. David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.

Nathan said to David, The Lord has also put away your sin. You shall not die. It's very important. What's happening in the two chapters we've looked at today is not the natural human consequences independent of God as though God somehow isn't able to stop the effects of sin.

No, no. This is the hand of God in judgment. We're not meant to read these two chapters in isolation but we are meant to see that sin spreads.

Sin's not a trivial occasional issue that we can keep under control and keep under wraps. Sin is a wildfire and it scorches our lives and it burns those around us and it destroys families and the thing that you and I have to do to feed that fire is nothing.

[21 : 36] Private sin has public consequences particularly within the family and David, I think his sin has moved him to become indecisive and self-absorbed and passive and it leads to disaster.

The great tragedy is that David had heard the word of forgiveness from God but he does not here act on that forgiveness. You'll have to decide for yourselves whether you think I'm right about this but I think David does not bring forgiveness to bear inside his family life.

God had said to him, I've put away your sin and do you remember last week we saw that the power of forgiveness gives us a place to stand in our life where we might be able to look at, to face and deal with the darkness and evil in our own lives.

It's the beginning of transformation. But the word of forgiveness and grace to us also gives us a place to stand to be able to face the darkness of those around us and within our own family.

The grace of God's forgiveness and being forgiven prevents us from being overreactive or underreactive. It prevents us from being moralistic, self-righteous hypocrites and giving advice everywhere and it prevents us from being uninvolved and distant and afraid of what other people think and it delivers us from that great self-delusion where I say, well I'll be non-judgmental.

[23 : 03] Like the hippie parents who say, I can never say anything to my kids because I did wrong things. Well of course, in ourselves we've got no grounds to say anything to anyone. But in the grace of God, the grace that takes away our sins, he gives us a place to stand even as we deal with the consequences of our own sin and live with the consequences of our own sin.

It's very good news. Where is God? Secondly and finally, where is the kingdom of God? Because you know since chapter 7 our hopes were high and God promised that he would bring an heir of an eternal kingdom so we look at the heir and we look at Amnon and we think, no thanks.

And we look at Absalom and we think, they're much better. And so we know if this kingdom of God is ever going to be established we're going to need a better Messiah and God's going to have to do it.

It can't be up to us. Which is why we ought to be allergic to that phrase, we are building the kingdom. We are not. God is. But I want to speak a little more personally just as we wrap up.

I want to speak to everyone here who may be an Amnon or a Tamar or a David or a Jonadab or an Absalom. And I want to do that by turning to the end of the Bible.

[24 : 23] If you have your Bible open turn to Revelation chapter 21 please. I'm going to read to you the first four verses.

This is the picture of our future brothers and sisters. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

Here is the picture of our future. It's the place of glory of life of love the new Jerusalem and all all that has been the destroying and destructing forces in our lives has been undone and is reversed not just stopped but is now permeated with the presence and glory of God.

[25 : 53] Flick your eyes down to Revelation 22 and I just want to read the first few verses there. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

Also on either side of the river the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him they will see his face his name will be on their foreheads and night will be no more they will need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever.

Here is the tree of life which we last met in the Garden of Eden it's the way God gives us his life it's watered by the rivers of life and it bears fruit different fruit new fruit fresh fruit constantly 12 times a year every month every possible flavour and its leaves are for the ongoing healing of the nations and here is the key don't lose me here is the key the word for tree here is not the usual word for tree it's the word for the cross it's the word the New Testament uses for the cross in other words the wood of the tree in the New Jerusalem is nothing other than the cross of Jesus Christ so here we are we live in sort of 2 Samuel 13-14 world this is where we're going to the New Jerusalem and between here we are and where we're going is this cross of Jesus Christ which becomes for us the tree of life where does true forgiveness come from it's from the cross of Jesus Christ where does true healing come from it's from the cross of Jesus Christ and I hope you've understood my great prayer for this is that you might look to the cross of Jesus Christ this week

I received a testimony and I want to read it to you this is from a woman who will remain anonymous she says I was sexually abused from a very young age by a family member one who was active in Christian ministry when I told my mother she didn't believe me and my father did nothing she speaks about being a teenager into binge drinking and using drugs in my 20s and 30s there were a haze of excessive excessive drug use drinking and high risk behaviour the shame and the pain that I kept trying to drown always returned it was overwhelming then she says I found living waters it's a ministry that's offered she said my life started to change in the most miraculous ways through prayer and confession I started to find freedom from my wounds I would crawl to the cross in shame and leave feeling at peace the cross covers all my past and it's always there for me and Jesus never fails to meet me there she speaks about the ongoing difficulty of dealing with her own anger and some other issue but she has begun to take the leaves from the tree of life and to cover herself and to cover her shame you see

[29 : 27] I don't know how to say this but on the cross of Jesus Christ Jesus bears all our shame and humiliation he takes the violence that we suffer and the violence that we instigate he takes it into himself it's the place of a massive exchange and it's not just a legal exchange it's a personal spiritual exchange with God himself that's what the cross is about so here we are together for those who've been humiliated and violated the cross is the place of beauty and restoration and for those who know you've got violence in you the cross is the only place you can stand and face the reality of your own evil and taste the healing leaves for those of us who are ambitious and gifted and self absorbed the cross has the power to transform you so that you might give your power away so that you might give life to other people and for those who've given up who feel paralyzed and passive because of your own past hear the word of forgiveness that comes from the cross

Jesus says it is finished I have taken your sin behold I make all things new may God give us grace as we come to the holy to the Lord's supper today to take the bread and to receive the wine and to draw near to the cross in a fresh way as God has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ Amen please kneel father such horrible horrible stories horrible stories such pain and we don't know what to do with them because it seems such a godless world a god forsaken world and we wonder and yet we thank you for them and what they teach about you because the bottom line is that such horrible tales like these today teach us that you and you alone are worthy of our praise and adoration you are the one that can heal us you are our ultimate resort you are the rock to which we cling in humble adoration you are our god and we are your horribly imperfect people so thank you for the complete story of David in the bible most of us would have settled for the feel good stories of the beautiful boy god's champion slain

Goliath and then becoming Israel's king we would have censored out the torty stories of his maturity and old age so father thank you for them and thank you for what they teach us that you love us even when we sin and sin so horribly thank you for the stories like David and Bathsheba that shows how you use even a gracious sin to bring glory to your name and above all we thank you that out of that flawed relationship so many generations later came our wonderful Lord Jesus his sacrificial death on the cross provides the true reconciliation of us to you thank you for your love and thank you for your ability to make magnificence out of rubbish so this morning out of our reflections of pain out of our reflections on horribly distorted life we offer ourselves again to you you know we are sinners you know we long to bring glory to your name father take us use us heal us perfect us through your holy spirit and bring us safe to you

Lord in your mercy we intercede this morning for our missionaries Sharon Thompson of the Whitcliffe Bible translators Catherine Grenette of the North American indigenous missionaries and Brian McConachie of and the work of Ratanak International we pray as well for our brothers and sisters who are sick and need your blessings be close to them father guard them keep them from despair alleviate their pain and fill their minds with the glory of you and their future in that new Jerusalem and so we lift up by name Rowena Derek Susan Marguerite Anne Chris and Brian and we'll take a short moment of silence to pray for others we know personally we pray as well for two of our sister churches in

Ontario St Luke's in Pembroke and St Peter's and St Paul's in Ottawa bless their various missionaries and their congregations bless their ministry in the towns they're in may they shine as lights and signposts showing the way to you Lord in your mercy lastly father this morning the subject of sin and its distortions is on our hearts and minds and it seems that every Sunday morning we confess our sins to you and then we go right out and almost sin immediately oh how we look forward to the new Jerusalem when you will have restored us to our original state of perfection and so one last lesson from father from

[36 : 46] David father help us finish the race that you've set before us and not quit halfway or even at the 99.99% mark teach us how to know when things that we think are right and good are really distortions and evil help us to discern when what seems lawful comes from distorted principle and above all give us grace to repent daily to pray with love and to have a zeal for your glory not our own and to rejoice in you and your design for us we ask these things in the name of our beloved Jesus Lord in your mercy and soul run through

Christ ¶¶ ¶¶