

The House Unravels

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[0 : 00] All right, so let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to receive your word this evening? In Christ's name, amen.

Well, like last week's story of David and Bathsheba, this one is just a moral disaster, right? Rape, incest, murder. And like last week, I spent a long time wondering why the story is in the Bible, why it's told in such detail, what could it possibly be teaching us?

So first question, why is it here? What's it doing here? Well, on its most basic level, it is a fulfillment of what God said would happen. If you remember last week in the reading, I didn't talk about it that much, but in last week's reading, after David took Bathsheba and murdered Uriah, took David's son as punishment, he talked about the consequences.

And he said to David, God said to David, the sword will never depart from your house, I will raise up evil against you from your own house. And just a reminder, all the characters in this are part of David's family.

So in its simplest term, God is saying to David, because of what you've done, there's going to be terrible consequences to your family. And so why is this story in the Bible? Well, it's part of God's judgment on David.

[1 : 23] Secondly, it explains the rest of 2 Samuel to us. Everything that happens from here on in, you can come in, you can put your finger on this story and go, ah, that happened because of this.

So it's setting us up for the rest of the narrative, and we'll discuss that over the next few weeks. Thirdly, the third resonance here, it is a cautionary tale. It's a warning given to us through these characters.

So let's have a look at them. First we have Amnon. He's the major player in the first half of the story. He's David's son. He's the eldest. He's the first in line to the throne.

He's the heir apparent. That's important. Remember that. And it's said that he was sick in love with his beautiful half-sister. And he recognizes that he couldn't legitimately have her, and it was tearing him up.

He didn't know what to do about it. He follows the advice of his cousin. Now the fact that he went through with what his cousin said tells us a few things about Amnon.

[2 : 27] First of all, he wasn't very smart. He wasn't a smart man. I mean, how did he think he could get away with this, right? And Tamar actually says that to him.

Like, I can't hide my shame. There's no way you get away with this. The guy was obviously thinking with his glands, not his brain, and that doesn't think too well, obviously.

He wasn't a smart man. Secondly, he had a real sense of entitlement. He probably had everything handed to him on a plate, all the woman he wanted, all the riches, all the food, everything he ever wanted handed to him.

And this one thing he really wanted, he couldn't work out how to get it. It's something... As I was thinking about this part of it, I was thinking, you know, as we live sort of in the fairly affluent west, I guess, particularly in such a beautiful place like Vancouver, with the promise of, you know, your best life now here, you deserve everything, sexual relief without commitment, unconsidered wealth accumulation.

There is a warning to us here, I think. So Amnon, you know, he's not smart, he's not thoughtful, he loves his sister, he rapes her, and then immediately hates her.

[3 : 49] So I mean, he's a horrible guy, right? Terrible, terrible guy. And I think the caution here is obvious, that giving ourselves over to our desires has horrendous consequences. And also, I just want you to note the consequential link between lust and hatred.

Okay, Jonadab. Jonadab. He's Amnon's cousin. He's actually, I think, one of the most dangerous guys in the whole passage.

He's smart enough to see that there's something wrong with Amnon. You know, he goes up to him and says, like, cousin, like, what's wrong with you? You don't look well. And Amnon says what's going on.

And Jonadab, instead of saying, you are a stupid man, just stop it, he says, well, here's what I think you should do. And gives him a plan to get Tamar in the room alone.

He's also the guy on hand when David thinks all his sons have been killed. And when it turns out they're not, you know, he's the guy that says, look, see, they're coming back, I told you.

[4 : 52] Everything's fine, everything's good. So he's clearly a fairly streetwise kind of guy. He's kind of shrewd, right? The passage describes him as a crafty man. And those are good things, crafty, shrewd, streetwise, that's all good stuff.

He has skills, relational skills, conceptual skills. But what he lacks is integrity. And I think here is the caution with this character. If God has given you wisdom, God has given you intelligence, if you can get things done, then pray that God would give you integrity with your insight.

I remember I went to Synod last year, which is like, you know, priest camp, I guess, I don't know.

You know, it's the Anglican guys get together.

And we're at some meeting. And a guy stood up and said, you know, what we need is, in the Anglican church, is we need ministers. We need priests who are really entrepreneurial.

Let's find these entrepreneurial guys, you know, and get them in here. That's what we need. And I stood up after him. And I said, this is my New Zealand bubbling up in me, right? Completely un-Canadian and inappropriate.

[6 : 03] And I said, when people say, what we need in the church is entrepreneurial people and the priesthood, I said, it makes me so nervous. And brother, I think you're wrong.

You know, because when the Bible talks about what makes you qualified for leadership, it has two qualifications. If you look through Titus, it says, there is a moral qualification. You've got to be a fairly kind of upright kind of person.

And there is a skill qualification. You know, can you teach the Bible? Can you pastor people? Moral and skill. There's no entrepreneurial bit.

And I think the warning here with Jonadab is what we need in leaders is not just smart people. It's not entrepreneurial people. It's not people that can make things happen.

It's people who have a good moral compass that follow the heart of God. Okay, onwards. Moving on. All right, next guy, David. David, David, David. Frustrating.

[7 : 06] Reading the story and thinking about what David should have done but did not. And this is the problem here. He is angry, but he does nothing. He hears what's happened.

His son from one wife has raped his daughter from another wife. He's angry. He should be, but does nothing. Now, it doesn't say why he doesn't do anything, but I can have two really good stabs at it.

I'd say one reason is he doesn't feel like he had the moral authority to do it because of what happened with David and Bathsheba. Because of what happened with Bathsheba and Uriah, he's probably thinking, man, if I come down hard on Amnon here, you know, my enemies will look at me and go, hang on, hang on.

Didn't you do something really horrible as well not that long ago? I think the second reason he doesn't do anything is because Amnon is the next in line to the throne. And David wants to protect his line.

He wants to protect him. Anyway, that's conjecture. We don't really know. But because of his actions, Amnon is a free felon, a free rapist. Absalom is driven to seeking revenge.

[8 : 15] And Tamar is very, very broken. So this is not David at his best. This is not King David who points us to King Jesus. King Jesus, who is the protector of the weak, who is the judge of the wicked.

And of course, there are many cautions here from David, from this character. Let me just focus on one. I wonder how much of what Amnon did was based on what he saw his father do.

David takes Bathsheba. Amnon takes Tamar. David kills Uriah. Absalom kills Amnon. I wonder if the caution here is how profoundly we shape our children.

Okay, Tamar. Tamar. Tamar is shown to be thoughtful and considerate. She makes food for her brother. She's also shown to be very smart under pressure.

When Amnon makes it clear what he's going to do, she's quick enough to attempt to convince him out of it with some really, fairly sturdy arguments. In verse 12, she says, this is outrageous.

[9 : 27] This is crazy. I can't hide my shame. Everyone's going to know what's going to happen. Right? This is crazy talk. Secondly, she says, hold off. I'll talk to my father. He will not withhold me from you.

She's sort of saying, listen, if we talk to dad, perhaps we can get married. Maybe we could make this legit. She's thinking on her feet. She's doing very well. And of course, Amnon doesn't listen. And goodness, the caution here. The way the passage is written, it's a chiasm, which draws our eyes to the central event and the central event in this passage is a sexual assault.

And why is the passage drawing our eyes to that? And I think it's because it wants to remind us of the vileness of sin. Because, I mean, it's easy to approach this on quite an academic level and get caught up in the theology of it and think how interesting chiasms are, et cetera, like what I just did, you know, and not be horrified by the sin.

Sin is awful and the Bible never wants us to get comfortable with it. Anyway, I think that's one of the big points and lessons from the character of Tamar. But there's something else I want to say about Tamar.

[10 : 42] Whilst she's the victim, she's also actually presented as the heroine. And I say that because she's this great example. And ironically, she's the only one who brings God into the equation.

She's the only one that tries to attempt anything good here. She's the only one that speaks truth and wisdom in the way she confronts Amnon. And in the words that she says to Amnon, literally she's saying, this is godlessness, what you're doing.

This is godlessness. And when she runs out, she doesn't go quietly. You know, she's wearing this outfit which signifies her as a virgin. You know, ready to be married.

And she rips it. Ashes, hand on head, right? She's saying, I have been violated. She's exposing the sin.

She's speaking truth. She's exposing the sin. These are the actions of a righteous person.

Ironically, as the victim, she's actually the only positive example in the whole thing for us.

[11 : 53] Absalom. Finally, Absalom. Absalom, Absalom, Absalom. That's something you'll hear next week. Absalom. The full brother of Tamar, the half-brother of Amnon. Verse 20, it says that Tamar turns up at his house and somehow he knows what's happened.

And he says, don't take it to heart, sister. Don't take it to heart. What an awful thing to say. What a horrible, horrible thing to say. I mean, he could have acted, right?

He could have done stuff. He could have gone to David, his father, and tried to advocate for Tamar. Find some way to help her re-enter society.

But he didn't. He says, just be quiet about this. And why does he do that? I mean, it says he hates Amnon, right? Why does he wait a couple of years?

Why is he so quiet? Why is he trying to shut her up? Let me remind you, Amnon is first in line to the throne. Any guess as to who's second in line?

[13 : 06] Absalom. Now, there is actually a brother in between them. He's mentioned only once. in, I think, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel 3, I think. He's never mentioned again, so we assume he's dead.

So this guy's next in line to the throne. He's a terrible person. He basically wants to use this situation as an opportunity to try and legitimately kill off his brother.

So he waits two years. His ambition is patient and cool and vicious. He organizes a big family gathering and gets his servants to kill off his brother.

And then he flees, eventually comes back a few years later. That's described in chapter 14. And he returns as the number one son, the next in line to the throne. Okay, what's the caution here?

Absalom. He gives himself over to base emotions, you know, fantasies of revenge, desire for power. And these things, you know, unchecked, can be catastrophic.

[14 : 17] Okay, so the original question. Why has God included this sordid tale in the Bible? And we've said, one, it's God's judgment on David to consequences of whatever he did with Bathsheba and Uriah.

Two, it's a narrative link between stuff that's happened before and the stuff that's going to come. It explains the rest of 2 Samuel. But, it's also a morality tale, you know.

It's, each male character offers up this cautionary tale. Amnon and Absalom give themselves over to desires. It's disastrous, the importance of being a good parent model, to pray for integrity.

It also shows us that, you know, speaking truth in horrible situations is the right thing to do. You know, ironically, it is the victim who's the only one that does the right thing here.

It's actually not the first time this happens in Samuel, actually. You think about Abigail and Hannah and even the crazy witch in Endor, right? They all spoke truth when the males weren't doing so well. But, is there anything else, right?

[15:30] Is it just, is it just a narrative segue? Is it just a morality tale? No, it's not. There is more. There is the big point, I think.

And I'll finish on this. Okay, like I've said a few times now, David, at his best, points to the character of God and that he is the rescuer, right?

He's the great leader. He rescues us. At his worst, he points to Christ because he shows us we need a better king. And you might be thinking, yes, but didn't we learn that last week?

Why don't you just group all these passages together? Get all the ugly stuff all together in one kind of sermon and get it out of the way, right? What is it about this passage which is different from last week?

What is it about the failure of David that teaches us about Christ and the amazingness of Christ?

Well, it's different to the last week in this sense.

[16:28] David's failing last week was moral. He was very, very naughty. This week, his failure is his inaction. And what about his inaction?

Well, there are three things he should have done and he didn't do. He should have. He should have restored his daughter. He should have done that. He should have punished Amnon.

He should have done that. He should have led his family in the way of forgiveness. He should have done that. Restoration, judgment, forgiveness.

These are all things he should have done and he did not do. And because he did not do these things, violence spirals out of control.

And we'll see that in the next few weeks. And this is where Jesus is awesome, right? David's inaction leads to violence, mutiny, death.

[17:30] Whereas Jesus does take action, doesn't he? The real king, he does take action.

And his action is to take this spiraling violence upon himself on the cross. And in that action, there is restoration, right?

There's restoration for broken people. There is forgiveness, isn't there? And there is judgment. He takes the judgment of God upon himself.

And that, my friends, is the gospel of the passage. We have a king who acts. Amen.