

Sexual Assault

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[0 : 00] This morning's lesson on Lament and Hope, the Bible, and Sexual Assault was not recorded due to a technical error, so I am re-recording the lesson, which is summarized in the handout that's also available on the website.

We had a testimony as well, but the testimony will not be recorded on the website. It was only for the actual class. But we have come to the last of our difficult topics concerning gender and sexuality.

We've considered homosexuality, we've considered transgender identity, we've considered pornography, and today we will consider the topic of sexual assault. These are different topics and yet all relate in some way to God's design for our bodies and gender and sexuality and the ways that we experience the fallenness and brokenness of this world and there are issues that Scripture speaks to, that Scripture has something to say about, and that the redemptive story that is centered in Christ can help us to unravel and understand and seek healing and grace from God.

This lesson includes material that may be disturbing. It should be disturbing. This is a difficult topic about something that is grievous and harmful.

But let us pray as we jump in, Lord, we pray that this session would be useful for all who hear. We pray that you would equip us for every good work.

[1 : 48] We pray that you would bind up those who are brokenhearted, and we pray that you would give us your wisdom and clarity. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So I want to start briefly with some current definitions and statistics.

Definitions of terms. There are three terms that are used in different ways. The first term, sexual assault, is the most general term. It refers to various kinds of unwanted or non-consensual sexual behavior or contact.

Sexual abuse is the second term. That usually refers to the sexual assault of a child, of a minor, or a person under 18. The third term is rape, which is a more specific term.

Now, there is some debate about how broadly or narrowly to define sexual assault, the most general term. There are legal questions. The term is defined differently in different U.S. states.

And there's a variety of legal concerns surrounding that. Different researchers define the term in different ways, which is why there are a variety of different statistics out there. Some larger and some smaller numbers.

[2 : 56] Some of that depends on definitions. And also, most sexual assaults are not reported to authorities or, at the very least, are reported many years later.

Particularly in the case of childhood, sexual abuse is often not uncovered at the time. So, there's a variety of statistics out there for that reason.

Now, regardless of how terms are officially defined, I think we should remember that many people have been wronged and harmed, even if their experience doesn't fit a particular researcher's definition or doesn't meet a criminal standard within their legal jurisdiction.

Now, how prevalent is sexual assault? A commonly cited statistic is that one in four women and one in six men have been or will be sexually assaulted within their lifetime.

And that statistic seems well-founded. If anything, the number, particularly for women, may be too low rather than too high. So, according to a survey in 2010 by the federal government, the Centers of Disease Control, 18% of women, that's about 22 million women in the United States, had been raped.

[4 : 05] So, 12% of women reported that they had experienced completed rape. Another 5% of women reported that they had experienced attempted rape.

And others reported rape while being under the influence of alcohol or drugs and unable to consent.

So, that's a high number of women who reported that they had been raped. There were also, as for men, there were five different studies in the 1990s and early 2000s, which all concluded that between 14% and 18% of boys had been sexually abused before they turned 18.

So, this is a widespread phenomenon and a problem. Now, there have been some controversies regarding accusations, the question of how common are false accusations of rape or sexual assault.

I've included a detailed footnote in the handout. I'm not going to go through that in detail right now. There's a relatively small number of reports of sexual assault that are demonstrated to be untrue, that are just completely fabricated.

[5 : 28] There is a more significant number of situations where something happened and the victim clearly has suffered some harm, but it may not be clear to the rest of us exactly what happened.

Who did what when? And there may not be enough evidence to convict the defendant of a crime. So, just... There's more that could be said about that question, but I don't want to get caught in that debate right now, but just want to acknowledge that.

And you can read the more detailed footnote on the handout if you want more information on that. Now, there is some good news. From 1994 to 2010, the prevalence of sexual assault and rape in the U.S. decreased by more than half.

So, it can... This can be addressed. It is not something that must be exactly the way it is now.

The rate has remained fairly steady since 2010. Now, many people think of victims being raped by strangers at gunpoint. That's actually very rare.

[6 : 45] 80% of victims were sexually assaulted by someone they previously knew. In many cases, a relative, occasionally a spouse or a friend, a dating partner, a pastor, a religious leader, a coach, teacher, boss, therapist, doctor.

Most victims were sexually assaulted by someone in one of those categories, rather than by a stranger. Among child sexual abuse victims, over 90% knew the person who abused them.

Perpetrators are rarely armed. Only 7% possessed a weapon during the assault. The vast majority of perpetrators are male, over 95%. The vast majority of victims, about 90% are female.

However, male victims of sexual assault should not be overlooked. They are much less likely to disclose information regarding their experiences. And on trauma symptom inventory tests, they reported higher levels of distress.

Now, what are some of the effects of sexual assault? Well, victims of sexual assault in general, and rape in particular, were found to suffer disproportionately from depression, suicidal thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder, and alcohol and drug abuse.

[8 : 02] Common emotional responses to sexual assault include denial, shame, guilt, anger, distorted self-image, and despair. So, this is a widespread problem with deep wounds that result.

Sexual abuse of children, once again, public statistics vary. According to one researcher, one in five girls and one in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse. I, you know, I've listed the best statistics I could come up with, but I can't quite reconcile them all, especially the male-female ratios don't quite line up.

But, this, it's a, it's a significant problem. In, in society as a whole, over the last two decades, the problem of sexual abuse within religious communities has received increased attention.

This past week, Rabbi Daniel Greer, a prominent Orthodox Jewish rabbi in New Haven, was sentenced to 20 years in jail for repeatedly sexually abusing a teenage boy who was enrolled in his Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva boarding school for high school age students in the early 2000s.

Last January, the Hartford Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church released a report listing a total of 48 priests and official leaders who had been credibly accused of sexually abusing minors in the diocese since its founding in 1953.

[9 : 25] Um, uh, but this is also a problem in Protestant, uh, churches. This past February, the Houston Chronicle reported that since 1998, roughly 380 Southern Baptist church leaders and volunteers have faced allegations of sexual misconduct involving over 700 victims.

About 220 offenders have been convicted or took plea deals and dozens of cases are pending. So this past June, uh, the Southern Baptist Convention devoted much of its annual meeting to the topic of preventing sexual abuse and caring well for survivors of abuse in the church.

There's an extensive report. There's a website, uh, that's, uh, caringwell.com that also includes a curriculum for local churches, um, and various initiatives towards preventing further sexual abuse and caring well for abuse survivors in the church.

Now, as for our church, uh, we have had Trinity Baptist church has had a sexual abuse policy and procedures in place for several years within our children's and youth ministries in particular. Uh, but policies and procedures in themselves are not sufficient.

And some of the big picture gospel principles that we believe are important is, uh, that the gospel calls us to cultivate a church culture that's more concerned with reality than with appearances.

[10 : 47] Sometimes when abuse has been covered up in the church, it's because we are more concerned with appearances than with reality. And we think that the gospel calls us to the reverse.

Uh, uh, Jesus is brutally honest about our sin and the suffering it causes. And at the same time, Jesus is amazingly gracious towards both sinners and sufferers.

And so we want to follow Christ's example and walk with Christ. We want to be honest and deal seriously with sin, not deny or minimize or excuse or pretend it's not there, but to confront sin when we find it in ourselves and in each other and to acknowledge that none of us are categorically immune to the deceitfulness of sin.

We cannot simply say, that's a horrible thing. I would never do something like that because sin is deceitful. And if you ask someone who has, who has, has perpetrated sexual abuse, if you ask them 10 years ago or 20 years ago or when they were 10 years old, would you ever do that?

Many of them would have said, no, that's horrible. I would never do that. So we want to face sin honestly, uh, and, and recognize its deceitfulness.

[11 : 59] But we also want to walk with each other in suffering. Um, we want to, we acknowledge that sin continues to have effects, uh, various effects throughout the world.

And so we don't hold out the false hope of an easy, comfortable, and superficially happy life in Christ, but we want to lament. The Bible calls us to lament the persistent and deep and widespread effects of sin in us and in our world.

But even more than all this, even more than taking sin and suffering seriously, we want to be a people who take Jesus even more seriously, who look to Jesus and find his grace is greater than all of our sin.

And his grace is greater than all the ways that we have been sinned against. The grace of Christ gives us hope even in the darkest valleys for he has gone before us and his spirit walks with us.

The grace of Christ empowers us to genuinely change because his death has freed us not only from the penalty, but also from the power of sin. And we see those as some of the big picture gospel foundations for a healthy church culture that will help us going forward.

[13 : 09] Now, let me step back for a minute and just ask the question, why does our secularized culture care so much about sexual assault? And why should Christians care about sexual assault?

I think we agree that this is a significant concern, but as our secularized culture approaches it from a slightly different perspective than the biblical one.

So the dominant view of our secular culture is that sexual assault is evil because it's a violation of an individual's autonomy. In other words, it's a violation of an individual's personal freedom to choose whatever they want to do with their own body because your own body belongs to you and to nobody else.

Also, our culture idolizes sexual activity and sexual expression and sees it as inherent to human flourishing and to being a human being.

So, I think our culture is particularly sensitive to sexual assault because it seems to threaten an individual's freedom to pursue sexual activity and sexual expression unhindered. Unfortunately, I think there are several weaknesses of our culture's dominant framework for understanding this issue.

[14 : 28] So a few weaknesses of our culture's approach to the issue of sexual assault. First of all, in our culture's view, everything ultimately rests upon the consent of individuals.

and so this notion of consent, affirmative consent, the notion of consent keeps getting defined and redefined, but people are grappling with it because it's sort of the only absolute we have left.

It's the only sort of strong moral standard that everyone is sort of leaning on. But here's the problem with individual consent.

Do we always know what we really want? Do we always say what we really feel? Even our own hearts can deceive us and our desires are easily swayed and often change over time.

And our culture, I think, contributes to this sort of confusion. Our culture celebrates unfettered sexual expression, unlimited sexual expression.

[15 : 35] It says, sex can mean whatever we want it to mean. It gives us no moral boundaries to guide us and then leaves us to ourselves to decide what we want to do and says we can change our decision at any moment and then we struggle to define what consent is.

And many people who consented at the time later feel awful. So even many people outside the church are questioning whether the principle of consent by itself is sufficient to guide the sexual relations of human beings.

another way to put this sort of contradiction is that our culture simultaneously expects and pressures us to be sexually active. One example of this sort of cultural pressure to be sexually active is recently I was talking to a 20-something year old guy who went to see a doctor and in the course of the medical checkup the doctor asked are you sexually active?

And the guy said no and the doctor said well okay you mean not now. And the guy said no actually I've never been sexually active. And the doctor was incredulous and just needed to be persuaded and sort of couldn't really believe what the guy was saying.

You know a 20-something year old who hasn't had sex. Our culture expects and pressures us to be sexually active.

[17 : 08] And at the same time our culture tells us we should never be expected or pressured no matter how slightly into any form of sexual intimacy by any other individual. But isn't that a contradiction?

Right? There's this general expectation and pressure to be sexually active and then there's everyone saying but no, no, no, you shouldn't let any other individual ever pressure you. So I think there's a problem here.

The other main problem with our culture's dominant view is that healing is ultimately self-generated. So there's a lot of emphasis on self-love, self-protection, self-affirmation, self-reliance, but that can be a crushing burden to bear.

When someone is emotionally fragile, anxious, depressed, self-hating, filled with shame, common emotions that people are feeling after sexual assault.

So that's it. And the believing that healing ultimately comes from ourselves can lead us to other places, other desires to ways of seeking to be in control of the unpredictable world around us.

[18 : 24] Those I think are some weaknesses of our cultures approach to this issue, but the biblical worldview I think gives us a deeper foundation and offers more enduring hope. The biblical worldview fully agrees that sexual abuse and assault are violations of human dignity, but in the biblical view, the reason for that is that God has created us in his image.

Sexual assault and abuse are violations of a body that God has made. Our body is a temple, a sacred space, a precious gift because God has fashioned it for himself.

And so sexual abuse and assault is not just a sin against another individual and their will, but it is ultimately a sin against God the creator. Further, sexual assault and abuse are violations of God's good design for humanity.

God designed human beings to fulfill our calling by exercising self-giving love in a variety of ways, in friendship, in neighborhoods, in the world, in nations.

But one expression of this self-giving love is the union of male and female bodies, lives, and resources within the promise of marriage.

[19 : 40] In marriage, the bodies of husband and wife belong to one another. Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 7. And so, in the biblical worldview, marriage provides the safe context for sexual intimacy, that free, self-giving love, expressed within the context of a total life union.

And I think that positive understanding of God's purpose for us makes sense of why sexual assault is such a violation of human dignity. Because it is the opposite of self-giving love.

Now, the Bible also offers a better hope for significant healing from a source beyond ourselves. I think that's another thing the Bible offers that our culture doesn't really.

Now, the Bible doesn't take away our human responsibility, it doesn't make us resign to fatalism, but it tells us that through Christ we are beloved children of God. And that we can lean on God in our weakest and darkest hours, and that He is compassionate and gracious.

And that alone can be a deeply restorative truth. Now, let's go on to consider what does the Bible actually say about sexual assault?

[21 : 12] Well, the first thing we notice is that the Bible is not silent about sexual assault. It doesn't pretend that such things don't happen or don't matter to God's people. The Old Testament is full of stories, and some of these stories include episodes that would fall into the category of sexual assault broadly defined.

So here are a few examples with some brief comments. So first example we see of this is Lamech threatens his wives.

He boasts to them, I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. Now, he's not explicitly threatening to sexually assault them, but what might his threat, his boast of his vengeful deeds, what might that indicate about Lamech's ongoing relationship with his wives?

Would they ever want to express any disagreement with him if he's boasting about killing a young man for striking him? Well, another example, voyeurism.

Voyeurism means sort of looking upon someone's sexual intimacy or nakedness without their consent or without their knowledge or insisting that they expose themselves in some inappropriate way to others.

[22 : 34] So, there's the incident with Ham who saw the nakedness of his father, told his two brothers, it's not entirely clear what was going on there. More clear would be David looking upon Bathsheba from the roof of his palace.

Another example is in the book of Esther, the king of Persia commands his officials to, the king of Persia throws this drunken party and the rule is it's an open bar and you don't say no and the king had a party for all the men in the palace.

And so they're all drunk, the king's drunk, and he commands his officials, bring the queen so that she can show the peoples and the princes her beauty for she was lovely to look at.

Now, it's not clear exactly what the king was requesting Queen Vashti to do, but Queen Vashti refused, surprisingly in that context, she refused to show her beauty to an audience of drunken males and the king was furious.

Now, the narrator implicitly presents Vashti as a woman of courage. Queen Esther, later on, will need to muster the same kind of courage to come before the king and the narrator presents the Persian king's behavior as dishonorable and foolish.

[23 : 50] Now, the narrator doesn't come out and say that, but if you look at how the narrator frames the story, you can sort of see it's painted in a negative light. Another example of sexual assault, a different kind, would be incapacitation, that is, deliberately getting someone drunk so that they're not aware of what they're doing.

So, Lot's daughters are desperate, they're living in the middle of nowhere, and they scheme to get their father drunk, and then they sleep with him while he is unaware in order to continue their family line. Another example, Potiphar's wife attempts to compel her servant Joseph to sleep with her in Genesis 39.

Joseph runs away, and he is then falsely accused. Now, statistically speaking, this is not the most common scenario, but the Bible knows that women can also be sexual aggressors, and men are sometimes falsely accused.

And that's an important thing to remember. Now, in Joseph's case, he was fired from his job and put in prison. He was later released, but Potiphar's wife was never punished.

I think the story of Joseph may provide comfort to those who are falsely accused or whose abusers are never brought to justice in earthly courts. Last example, a fear of sexual assault.

- [25 : 18] We see this in the book of Ruth. So, Naomi says to Ruth, it's good for you to work in Boaz's field, lest in another field you be assaulted. And likely, Naomi's concern is not only that Ruth would be beaten up, but that she might be sexually assaulted because Boaz says he has charged the young men, that is his field workers, not to touch Ruth.

He has seen her and he has specifically taken measures to protect her. The word touch is sort of a word that indicates sexual relations in the book of Ruth.

A couple of reflections on Ruth, Boaz, or the book of Ruth, Boaz is a godly man. He's someone who watches out for the well-being of women in the midst of a world where women are often unprotected and dishonored.

So, Boaz in many ways is a godly example of manhood who's a good model to follow after. Ruth is also a godly example of womanhood.

She lives courageously. She goes out, she works hard from early morning, works from early morning to late at night in an unfamiliar place despite the dangers in order to support herself and her mother-in-law. She also lives wisely.

- [26 : 30] She pursues marriage to Boaz, a man who will protect and honor her, a man whose character, moral character and godliness is evident and she avoids getting involved or entangled with men of less honorable character.

So, Boaz and Ruth are both godly examples of manhood and womanhood to emulate. Now, those are some examples of sort of sexual assault or even some could be classified as sexual harassment more broadly categorized, but the Old Testament also includes four extended narratives of forcible rape, the most flagrant and violent form of sexual assault.

Now, note again, biblical narrators rarely make explicit statements about the character's intentions or about the righteousness or wickedness of their actions. In most cases, they show us rather than tell us what we need to know.

So, I want to look at each of these four extended narratives and make some reflections on each. First, Genesis chapter 19. This is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Basically, the leaders of Sodom threaten to gang rape God's messengers. They surround Lot's house, all the men of Sodom, both young and old, to the last man.

- [27 : 45] They surround Lot's house. They demand that he send out the two visitors who are God's messengers that he had received. Now, they're prevented from carrying out their intentions.

They're struck blind. But this is a sign of Sodom's utter moral corruption and injustice which cries out for God's active judgment twice. The text talks about the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave.

What conclusions might we draw? Well, a nation that is characterized like Sodom by unrestrained sexual violence perpetrated by its leaders is wicked and dishonorable and crying out for God's judgment to call upon it.

It's not just one or two of the leaders who are then held to account by others and rightly held accountable and punished. It is one that where sexual violence has become characteristic and unrestrained.

Now, Lot is foolish to bargain with such wicked people. Lot bargains with them. He offers to send out his two virgin daughters instead of the men. But this is foolish.

- [29 : 00] Lot is a believer but he does not exert a godly influence in Sodom and instead he is gradually drawn into Sodom's corruption and himself needs to be rescued. He needs to be literally dragged out of the town before it burns.

Lot would be wise to flee. And sometimes believers need to ask themselves, am I exerting a godly influence or do I need to walk away from wickedness?

Third reflection. In this episode, rape is portrayed as an expression of power and dominance, not the product of an excessive or uncontrolled sexual desire. The men of Sodom threaten to rape the male visitors to dishonor and humiliate them, not because they are sexually attracted to them.

Sexual assault of a male victim damages this man's sense of his masculinity in particular ways. The second story is similar to Sodom. It happens in Judges 19, but in this case it happens within the nation of Israel.

And in some ways that's the sort of part of the story that's most hideous is that God's own people have become just as morally corrupt as the people of Sodom.

[30 : 16] So once again, an old man takes in two visitors for the night in the city of Gibeah. It's a Levite and his servant, the men of the city, surround the house, demand to have the Levite come out.

The host begs them not to act so wickedly. He offers them two women instead and says violate them, do with them what seems good to you.

The Levite sends out his concubine and the men knew her and abused her all night until the morning and in the morning the woman is found dead on the front doorstep of the house. It's a gruesome story.

It's probably the lowest, one of the lowest points that the people of Israel sink to in the entire Old Testament. The Levite cuts his concubine's dead body into twelve pieces and sends them throughout the land of Israel.

The rest of the Israelites are outraged. They say such a thing has never happened. They all gather together. They agree that the worthless fellows of Gibeah must be punished. The tribe of Benjamin, to which Gibeah belonged, refuses to hand them over, so they attack the tribe of Benjamin.

[31 : 32] And a civil war results. Reflections on this passage. When members, or I think this passage particularly speaks to God's church because it's God's people, Israel in the Old Testament, who are called to be distinct in the world and to bear witness to God's character.

And instead it's become the reverse. So when members or leaders of God's church sexually abuse or violate others, the entire community of God's people will be judged.

Unless it courageously holds those people to account, removes them from their positions of leadership, and excommunicates them from the church if they remain unrepentant.

Next passage is Genesis 34. In this passage, we're talking about Jacob's daughter Dinah. She goes out to visit the women of the land and she, during her travels, is raped by Shechem, the son of a local prince.

Dinah's brothers are furious and they respond by plotting. And their plot is successful. They kill every male in Shechem's city. Well, what do we see here?

[32 : 49] In the face of sexual assault and abuse, anger is justified. The men, Dinah's brothers, were indignant and very angry because Shechem had done an outrageous thing by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done.

Genesis 34.7. Again, the author of Genesis makes a very strong statement, being very explicit that we wouldn't miss the point that this was way off the map.

This was an outrageous and terrible thing that he, as the text says, seized her and lay with her and humiliated her.

Dinah has brothers who stand up for her, who are angry on her behalf and who insist on seeing justice done. She is not left alone to wear, to bear the weight of being violated. And the brother's solidarity with Dinah is a good thing, though it is sadly too rare.

Many female victims of sexual assault only find support from other women. But we also see in this story that righteous anger can boil over into ungodly rage. Now, Jacob is initially unhappy that his sons massacre all the males of the city and his protest seems a little bit cowardly.

[34 : 01] You've brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land. But he does have a point that they've gone overboard. Later, Jacob says of Simeon and Levi, cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel.

The other thing we see in this story is we see a twisted combination of humiliating sexual violence followed by intense romantic attraction and tender expression.

So after Shechem raped Dinah, it says, then his soul was drawn to Dinah. He loved her and spoke tenderly to her and proposed to marry her.

And that combination of humiliation and violence combined with intense romanticism and tenderness can be deeply confusing for victims of sexual assault when a perpetrator expresses no repentance or only superficial repentance for violence or deception or manipulation, but nevertheless continues to lavish words of kindness and expressions of care on the victim in an effort to regain the victim's approval and trust.

The last episode is 2 Samuel 13. King David's daughter Tamar is raped and then cast away by her half-brother, Amnon. King David had several children by several different wives.

[35 : 23] David's oldest son was Amnon. Amnon became infatuated with his beautiful half-sister Tamar. And we can see the twisted nature of Amnon's attraction from the beginning.

Amnon's friend hatches the plot with him. Amnon pretends to be ill. He stays in bed. He asks his father, King David, send Tamar to my house so she can make dinner for me. Tamar does so.

Amnon sends everybody else away, calls Tamar into his bedroom. He makes his intentions clear. Tamar protests. No! Don't do this! But Amnon wouldn't listen. And being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her.

Amnon then hates her and sends her away. Once again, despite her protests. Tamar then 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. The last we hear of Tamar is that she lived as a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house. Tamar did not receive the kind of immediate support from her male relatives that Dinah did.

[36 : 29] Her father, King David, was very angry, but said and did nothing. David always appears to be relatively passive and disengaged and indulgent toward his sons. Tamar's brother Absalom's initial reaction was to say to Tamar, hold your peace, my sister.

He is your brother. Don't take this to heart. Absalom also says nothing to Amnon initially, but two years later, Absalom had Amnon murdered. And that sets off another cycle of revenge within David's family.

Reflections on this story. First, sexual assault has lasting emotional and relational consequences. These are powerfully depicted. Tamar adopts the posture of a grieving woman with ashes on her head.

She weeps uncontrollably as she walks down the road. Amnon has used and discarded her like an object. So she tears her long robe, representing her dignity torn apart.

She's now seen as damaged goods unfit for marriage to another man in her society. And even more, in the aftermath of her assault, she receives no sympathy from her brother or her father, only platitudes and silence.

- [37 : 36] She lives the rest of her life as a desolate woman. Her cry is echoed by many victims of sexual assault and abuse. Where could I go to get rid of my disgrace? Second, reflection, sexual assault is not the victim's fault.

Now, of course, there are some situations where a victim has acted unwisely or sinfully, and it is appropriate and important to acknowledge this. But the point remains that the victim is not to be blamed for the perpetrator's sin.

Tamar is the only character in this story who displays consistent integrity and godliness. All the other characters in the story manifest serious character flaws.

Amnon, Absalom, David, Amnon's friend Jonadab, they're all deeply flawed. By contrast, Tamar is hospitable toward Amnon cooking a meal for him when he's apparently sick and confined to bed.

She's courageous. She declares God's truth to Amnon. She resists him rather than merely yielding to his ungodly desires, even though he's physically stronger and more intimidating than she.

- [38 : 44] And at the end, her lament at the end of the story is a righteous response to evil and injustice. In the Psalms and in the book of Revelation, the righteous sufferers cry out, O Lord, how long?

Tamar is among their company. Now, the unresolved story of Tamar, the righteous sufferer whose life ended in seeming destitution, points us to a fifth biblical example of humiliation, abuse, and violence.

This last biblical example is not one that we normally associate with the offense of sexual assault. But the New Testament Gospels culminate in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the righteous one, which was undeniably an act of humiliation, abuse, and violence.

Consider some of what happened to Jesus on the way to the cross. He was portrayed by a close friend with whom he had broke bread the night before. He was abandoned by those who had promised to remain with him always.

He was stripped of his robe and violently beaten. He was mocked and spit upon. He was publicly humiliated and disgraced. He was put on display before a hostile crowd, naked and exposed, except perhaps for a loincloth.

- [39 : 57] He was crucified outside the camp in the place of defilement. His life ended in seeming desolation and disgrace. And yet our great hope is that the story of Jesus, who is also the only entirely righteous and godly character in all of scripture, does not end with crucifixion and disgrace.

Three days later, this same Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death and sin forever. Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame for the joy set before him, the joy of bringing us, many sons and daughters, with him, bringing us from shame and despair to everlasting joy and glory.

So truly this Jesus is, for all victims of sexual assault who will turn to him, a merciful and faithful high priest, who is not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but who in every respect has been tempted as we are and yet without sin.

There is even hope for perpetrators of sexual assault who will turn to Jesus, for Jesus prayed from the cross even for those who were mocking him and who had crucified him.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. From the cross he assured a criminal who was repentant, who had been condemned to die for his crimes. Today you will be with me in paradise.

[41 : 13] Jesus Christ offers hope to sinners and to sufferers, and in the end, we all belong to both groups. In one way or another. In light of what Christ has done, Hebrews invites us, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

Sexual assault and abuse are deeply damaging, but through Christ, significant redemption is possible. Amen. Amen.