

Tamar, Amnon and Absalom

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

November 10, 2024 AM Sermon

Reverend Peter Jonker

2 Samuel 13:1-22

Before I begin this reading I need to offer a disclaimer and an apology, last week we had the terrible story of David and Bathsheba. That sermon started with a depressing look at David's sin; it was an ugly close-up. It was not a fun, uplifting Bible passage. I'm afraid this week is more of the same. I'm about to read another ugly Bible passage. But that's just because of where we are in the David story.

Most commentators will tell you that last week's story is a turning point in David's reign. Through chapter 8, David is doing great, his kingdom is stable and life is mostly good. But after David's abuse of Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, things change. It's like dark forces are unleashed. In 2 Samuel 12:10 God pronounces his judgment over David. Though he didn't take the kingdom from David, God does say, "from now on the sword will never leave your house." And from now on, that's what you see in David's reign. There are still moments of goodness, but they are definitely overshadowed by trouble and instability.

The trouble starts immediately with this story, the story of Amnon. Amnon is David's eldest son, the crown prince of Israel, the heir apparent. Turns out, Amnon is a chip off the old block, but not in a good way. Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22

Another terrible story, and one of the things that's hard about preaching a story like this one is that God does not appear in this passage. All we see in this passage is humans behaving badly. Last week at least we heard that 'the thing David has done displeased the Lord'; this week we don't have even that. All we have is a dumpster fire of human behavior. But as you all just said, this is the Word of the Lord, and this too is inspired by the Holy Spirit. "All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," says Paul and 2 Timothy and that applies here too.

So let's take a look at what the Spirit is teaching us in this passage. In this passage the Holy Spirit is teaching us about the nature and power of sin. There are three aspects of sin that the Spirit shows us in this passage.

First the Spirit is showing us something about the sin of Lust. In their church school class our 11th and 12th graders are studying the 7 deadly sins, and this sermon series has been a good counterpart to that study. So far in this sermon series we've already had a look at two of the 7 deadly sins. Envy with Saul, and last week we talked about sloth with respect to David. Today is a classic picture of one of the other 7 deadly sins, the sin of lust. In this passage, Amnon is in the grip of some really destructive Lust.

Lust is a distortion of the gift of sexuality. Sexuality is one of God's good gifts and he created our sexuality for three things. Sex is for intimacy. Sexuality is designed to create a close bond between two people and in its fullest expression it's designed to create deep intimacy between a husband and a wife. In Genesis 2 God created sex because it was not good for humans to be alone, so sex is for intimacy. Sex is also for creating life. In Genesis 1 God tells the man and the woman to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. So sexuality is also for the creation of new life which is a great design on God's part because the first two elements in God's design fit together perfectly. If babies are going to thrive, they need to grow up in a context of intimacy. And finally human sexuality is for pleasure. Sexuality is part of the joy and spice of human life. You can read all about that part of sex in Song of Solomon. So, properly ordered, sex is for intimacy, life and pleasure.

Lust only wants one of those three. Lust only wants the pleasure. Lust wants to take the gift of sex and strips away the intimacy (lust doesn't want the complication of a relationship). It also wants to strip away the life (lust definitely isn't interested in starting a family). Lust just wants the pleasure. In fact, lust idolizes the pleasure.

In our passage, Amnon is clearly in the grip of lust. His focus on desire and pleasure is so strong that he's physically sick. He's like a drug addict who can think of nothing else but getting a fix. He's not interested

in intimacy with Tamar. Instead he sets up a situation where she makes him food while he can leer at her with a pornographic stare. He doesn't want intimacy with her, he wants to consume her. And he's definitely not interested in starting a family with her and settling down. Tamar offers as much. 'Your father would let us get married,' she says. But that's not what he wants; he just wants the pleasure and he takes it with violence.

His reaction after the encounter shows how lust deceives and destroys. It promises to satisfy you; but it delivers death and disappointment. When the deed is done, Amnon is not satisfied, he's miserable. He hates himself for what he's done. He hates Tamar because she reminds him of what he's done, and so he screams at her, "Get up and get out."

Lust is a destructive force in our society. The multi-billion-dollar porn industry sells you this deadly sin by dressing it up in high production values. It promises you the pleasure of sex and the spice of sex without any attachment, without any intimacy, without any guilt. It's a false promise. It's the way of death, loneliness and self-hatred. The story of Amnon is 3000 years old, but its insights on sin are as up to date as the latest psychological study.

The second thing this story shows us is the communal aspect of sin. Sins like Amnon's are obviously the result of an individual's choices and an individual's actions. Amnon is responsible for what he did. But this passage shows us how a community forms a context that either enables these choices, or discourages these choices. The culture of a community can degrade sin's power, or it can enable it.

In this story David's household has become a culture that enables Amnon's sin. That starts with David's sin in the previous chapter. Amnon knows what David has done. Amnon has seen what Dad is willing to do to satisfy his sexual appetites. He sees all the wives and the concubines. He saw what David did to Bathsheba. Do you think living in that environment helps Amnon check his sexual appetites? After seeing what his Dad did, is he incentivized to control himself? David's sin has created a culture of permissiveness.

Amnon's cousin Jonadab is the embodiment of that. He and Amnon are like a couple of locker room bros. "Dude, I know how you can seduce her." Imagine if instead of encouraging Amnon he'd said, "Amnon, she's your sister!? Don't do this." Or even if he'd said, "Amnon, are you sure this is a good idea?" Instead he encourages Amnon's pornographic imagination. 'Dude, let me help you!'

And then there's David. What does David do when he finds out about what's happened? What does David do when he finds out that his daughter has been raped? He does nothing. He gets angry, but he does nothing. He is passive. He doesn't confront his son. He doesn't punish him. He just lets the sin go. This is bad. David is Israel's king and doing justice is literally at the top of his job description. Psalm 72 is the job description for a king; read it and you'll see what I mean. The very first words of the psalm are: "endow your king with justice O God." "May he defend the afflicted among the people." Justice is job one. He totally fails in his assignment, even though the afflicted one is his own daughter! When you live in a culture where people know that they probably won't face any consequences for their action, you shouldn't be surprised if they do terrible things.

Of course everything happening in David's court in chapter 13 looks very familiar to women who are victims of sexual harassment and sexual abuse. The kinds of dark instincts that move Amnon live in every human heart. We all struggle with lust in one way or another. But it's when these desires find themselves in a culture that winks at lust, or feeds it, or laughs at it, or douses it with pornography and coarse talk; that's when things go off the rails. Sexual abuse thrives when people wink at locker room talk and say 'boys will be boys.' Sexual abuse thrives when perpetrators are not held accountable.

On the other hand, if we had a culture of accountability, and kindness and gentleness where the weak are defended and where intimacy is valued, if you are part of a community that doesn't wink at pornography and coarse joking, maybe the Amnons of the world work a little harder at controlling themselves. The church is supposed to be that kind of community. In a healthy church, the Holy Spirit roots you in friendship and hope and kindness. The Spirit creates a community where all people are valued and we are taught to see each other as creatures made in the image of God and beloved by God. A community that encourages each other towards goodness and holds each other accountable. When the Spirit roots you in that kind of community, when the

Spirit makes that your context, your bad instincts shrink because they are not fed, and in their place the Spirit grows his fruit.

The third thing this passage shows us is sin's momentum. Sin is never an isolated event, sin has momentum. Sin bears fruit. Sin grows and spreads. One sin might seem like a small snowball, but that snowball starts rolling down the hill and grows and becomes an avalanche.

That's totally the picture here. David's sin is the snowball starting down the mountain. In this chapter we see that little snowball growing and picking up steam when Amnon rapes his sister, by the end of the passage we have the start of the avalanche. Our passage ends by zooming in on Absalom's hatred of Amnon. That anger will simmer and grow for two years. Eventually Absalom will murder Amnon. That murder will create a rift between David and Absalom, a rift that will snowball into a civil war, a civil war that will cause Israelites to kill their brothers by the thousands. Amnon's lust isn't just a private individual sin, it attracts and fuels, anger, hatred, division, murder, deceit, despair.

Sin has dark momentum. It's the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit. When you are caught up in the Spirit and engaged with God's people, you get good momentum. Good leads to good. Compassion multiplies into kindness and gentleness. Self-control multiplies into perseverance and faithfulness. It's a multiplication process led by the Holy Spirit and it leads towards life. Sin's momentum is led by the power of the evil one and it leads towards loneliness and death. In this part of the David story the momentum is all towards chaos and death. People are carried along in the avalanche.

It must have been a terrible thing to live in the middle of the civil war that ravaged the kingdom at the end of David's reign. To live in a country where people who used to get along, people who called each other brothers and sisters suddenly turn on each other, where trust and civility and kindness are in retreat and fear and suspicion are ascendant. It must have felt like things were spiraling out of control, like society had lost its mind. It must have seemed as though sin had all the momentum.

I know that half of you feel that way after last Tuesday. I know that half of you don't. But I know that all of us have felt this way about our society at one time or another over the last years. Like this snowball of division and anger is growing and multiplying, while the voice of hope and optimism and faith is getting drowned out and swept away.

Is there any hope in this story for those of us who feel this way or who have felt this way? There is hope. But it is not in the verses I read. The hope is in the bigger story, the one that surrounds these verses. If you were living in the times of this story and especially in the times right after this story, it would feel as though sin has all the momentum. But when you see this story in the context of the rest of this book, you realize that there is another momentum at work here. A deeper momentum. A more ancient momentum. A stronger momentum that completely surrounds even this chaos. And that is the holy momentum of God's promises. That is the holy momentum of God's covenant. Even though you can't see him or hear him in this story, God is underneath it and above it and through it and he is making a way, he is working for good.

In this story, we see the failure of Israel's anointed kings, what we don't see and what David can't see is that the Lord is working towards another anointed King. He is working towards Jesus. The Christ. The anointed. Where David fails to speak, he will speak the truth. Where David fails to care for the weak, he will take time for lepers and beggars and children. Where David fails to do justice, he will give his life for justice, for our justification. This story shows us sin's terrible momentum; Jesus will unleash a holy momentum upon this world, a momentum that will someday defeat all evil, wipe away all tears and make all things new.

Every Sunday we try to tell you that here. Every Sunday you come out of the world where it feels as though you are being swept along by chaos, a world where it seems as though your sickness, or your loss, or your hurt, or the fear has all the momentum. But, you come here and you are enveloped in a different story. We remind you of the holy momentum of the kingdom. We literally put you in the middle of it; the story is all around you. There's Jesus coming to us as a baby to help us with our loneliness and our fear. There he is facing down the devil's temptations. And over there he's calming the sea for some frightened disciples. And there he

is laying down his life to destroy the power and momentum of sin. And there he is rising from the grave, unleashing a holy momentum on the earth that won't stop until it makes everything new.

This is the truth of history. This is the avalanche. So don't be afraid and don't be discouraged. Go out in the world and do things that are full of love and say things that are true, meet cynicism with hope, and know that your anointed Lord goes with you.

©Rev. Peter Jonker