**Rape and murder in David’s house** 11/6/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 13, Psalm 51

Text: 2Samuel 13

Psalms: 25:1-9, 45:1-9, 30:6-11, 72old

Have you ever asked a policeman what is the worst thing about his or her job? If you do, I am sure they will reply, ‘Domestics’. They hate being called to homes to settle violent family disputes. But they reluctantly go and deal with domestics, just as I reluctantly have to deal with this ‘domestic’ recorded in the Bible. But as I was preparing this sermon I was reminded that it is important for us to know our enemy, the same enemy that came to Eve in the Garden of Eden. This enemy came to Amnon holding out ‘forbidden fruit’; has he come to you? I was also reminded that, ‘All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness’ (2Tim 3:16 NIV). So as we read and meditate on this tragic tale may we learn, and indeed be warned of our battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

This tragic tale is not unique in the Bible; it actually parallels the sins of adultery and murder committed by King David. And it is far from unique when it comes to what we hear and read in the media today. ‘Did you rape her?’ the journalist asked Bruce in a TV interview; ‘She told the world that you did’. ‘No, definitely not’ he replied. A high profile footballer was recently sent to prison for rape. Almost daily the words ‘sexual abuse’ are heard in the news. Years ago when marriage was practiced and honoured we hardly ever heard these words- not that sexual abuse and rape did not occur. Some think it is that these things are being called out today, which is true, but with sex outside marriage being normalised, sexual abuse has become more common. Our courts no longer rule on ‘sex outside marriage’ but on whether the sex was consensual or not.

King David lusted after another man’s wife and violated her, and now his son lusts after his own sister and violates her. The prophet Nathan declared to David by way of punishment for his adultery and murder that calamity would come upon his household and, ‘The sword shall never depart from your house’ (12:11, 10). In this chapter we see this prophecy being fulfilled. The Lord in his grace forgave David but he would still see the consequences of his sin. ‘Whatever a man sows, that he will reap’ (Gal 6:7). Our subheadings are: ‘Driven by lust-Amnon’, ‘Destruction of Tamar’s life’, and ‘Death at the hands of Absalom’.

**1. Driven by lust-Amnon**

The tragic events of this chapter occurred ‘After this’ or ‘In the course of time’ (13:1). David’s children had obviously grown up; he had children from more than six wives before taking Bathsheba. Amnon was his firstborn and Absalom his third, by another wife (3:3). Most people are familiar with the six wives of Henry VIII, king of England; David did not resort to killing his wives, just one husband! His lust for and adultery with beautiful Bathsheba was followed by the murder of Uriah her husband. The Lord forgave David but his sins hung as a dark cloud over his household. Was this the reason he failed to exercise discipline and justice within his own family? As king, David was judge over all Israel, but not, it would seem, over his own family.

This chapter begins and ends with Absalom, the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (3:3). It begins with Absalom’s beautiful sister, Tamar; the name means ‘date palm’ (Songs 7:7). Tamar is mentioned by name in 1Chronicles 3:9, but nothing more. The other characters in this chapter are Amnon, the son of Ahinoam, and Jonadab their cousin. Amnon was driven by lust, a case of ‘like father like son’. Lust, like pride, belongs to every sinful heart: ‘The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life’ (1John 2:16). But lust must not be allowed to rule our hearts if we are to avoid its consequences, and not sin against God of course. We read that Amnon ‘loved her’, his sister Tamar, but his actions show it was more lust than love. If he truly loved his sister he would not have violated her as he did.

Amnon was frustrated to the point of sickness as he lusted after his beautiful sister, ‘for she was a virgin’ (12:2). We could say he was ‘love-sick’, but he knew he could never have her; being his sister she was ‘forbidden fruit’. But he was listening to the flesh and to Satan, not to the Lord and his word. Satan was ready to lead this love-sick boy into heinous sin. And he has just the man to do his dirty work, a crafty cousin called Jonadab (13:3). He is called a friend but proves to be the sort of friend to avoid.

Jonadab showed concern that Amnon was looking thinner and more haggard by the day. Amnon confided in him that he was in love with his sister, or half-sister called Tamar, but it was not lawful for him to marry her (Lev 18:9). A wise friend would have told him, ‘You cannot have her so get over it; if you really love her you will not touch her’. But this cousin, this agent of Satan, helped Amnon plot a way to have her, a way to satisfy his lust. He told him to lie on his bed and pretend to be ill. When his father David came to check on his eldest son he should ask him to send his sister Tamar with special food; but more than this, to cook this food before his eyes, and more than this to feed him like a baby (13:5). David came and did as Amnon asked, no questions asked. Nurses were sometimes seen as therapy apart from their medicine- but not matrons! Did David think Tamar was a ‘protected sister’? Did a degree of blindness overcome him? He could have prevented this terrible sin and the resulting destruction of his daughter’s life.

Tamar obeyed her father’s instructions and went to Amnon’s house to prepare for food this sick boy (13:7, 8). She found him lying down. She took some flour and made some cakes while he watched her; and he watched her closely! When she brought the cakes to him he refused to eat. He sent all the servants out so he could be alone with Tamar. She innocently brought the cakes to him in his bedroom, and as they say, the rest is history, the history of tragedy striking David’s family as prophesied by Nathan.

Amnon grabbed his sister and forced himself upon her. She protested, reasoning with her brother that such a disgraceful thing should not be done in Israel (13:12). They had grown up together, gone to the house of the Lord together and heard the word of God read. To violate her, as he was about to do, would have brought shame upon her, as well as upon him; ‘You would be like one of the fools in Israel’ (13:13). As a fool in Israel he was unlikely to become king. Her final desperate plea was the suggestion that he speak to the king, ‘for he will not withhold me from you’ (13:13). The king ruled with great authority and might even choose to ignore what is written- she was desperate. But, driven by lust, Amnon would not listen to reason or the pleading of his own sister to stop. He was stronger and he raped her (13:14).

**2. Destruction of Tamar’s life**

We know that Amnon’s love was actually lust because after violating her his love turned to hate. Having used and abused her, he was done with her: ‘Get up and get out!’ he shouted. We might contrast the response of the pagan man who violated Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. He wanted to marry her because he loved her (Gen 34:2, 3). Amnon knew he had sinned and, like his father, he wanted to cover it up. He wanted Tamar to go quietly and never come back. But sending her away would be even more wicked than what he had already done because covering up sin can be even more heinous than the sin itself- just ask David!

The right thing for Amnon to do would have been to confess his sin and at least show some compassion towards his victim. But sadly, treating the victim of one’s sin like dirt is the more usual response. Thankfully, he did not have time to plot her demise. When he threw ‘this thing’ out (13:17), she tore her beautiful dress, put ashes on her head, and went home crying uncontrollably (13:19). Her life was ruined. She was no longer a beautiful virgin looking forward to marriage and a family. She lived in solitude and sorrow in the home of her full brother, Absalom.

Absalom, whose name incorporates the Hebrew word for peace, was not thinking about peace when he saw his sister Tamar, and learned that she had been sent to Amnon’s room. He told Tamar to hold her peace and get over it, even as he plotted revenge (13:20). Because Amnon was her brother it was a very messy situation, and all the more because it was the royal family, and he was the crown prince.

What did David do when he heard what had happened? Did he feel guilty for sending Tamar to the room of his ‘sick’ son? We are told that he ‘was very angry’, but not told who he was angry with (13:21). If he was angry with his son, as he should have been, he failed to translate his anger into justice. How could the king judge Israel but fail to deliver justice to a woman who was raped, especially his own daughter? He knew the penalty was death (Lev 20:17). But as far as we know, David didn’t even ask Amnon to confess. Did he feel morally crippled by his own adultery and murder? In the LXX of verse 21 we find some additional words: ‘But he would not punish his own son Amnon because he loved him, for he was his firstborn’. Whatever the reason, David failed to deliver justice, and will suffer the consequences of this sin of omission.

**3. Death at the hands of Absalom**

Justice was neither done nor seen to be done in the house of David, and in the absence of either, resentment and revenge will fester. Absalom plotted revenge on his sister’s behalf, and maybe on his own behalf; he nursed this bitterness for two years; some nurse bitterness for much longer of course. While his brother broke the seventh commandment, Absalom was planning to break the sixth; their father broke both commandments all by himself!

Absalom’s men were finishing up the shearing of his sheep at a place on the southern border of Ephraim. As we have seen with Nabal, this was a time for celebrating with friends and family. Absalom invited the king’s sons and the king himself (13:23, 24). David excused himself, not wishing to be a burden to his son. He blessed Absalom; this son does not appear to be less loved than his elder brother (13:25). Absalom pleaded for David to send Amnon, the crown prince, which he did with some reluctance (13:27). We know that David was sending his son, Amnon, to his death, and that after sending his daughter to be raped. David was not to know what would happen of course, apart from the prophecy that trouble would come upon his house because of his sin (12:11).

‘Now Absalom had commanded his servants’ to strike Amnon and kill him after he had plied him with wine, which they did (13:28, 29). The other brothers took fright, jumped on their mules and fled. News reached David before the mules, news that Absalom had killed all his sons; something a son aspiring to be king might do. In distress and mourning, David tore his garments and lay on the ground. But Jonadab was on hand to explain the situation to David. This crafty fellow was always endearing himself to others for his own evil purposes, political purposes most likely. Jonadab assured David that only Amnon was dead and he was a dead because of what he did to Tamar, Absalom’s sister. He told David not to ‘take this thing to heart’, knowing that he would do just that (13:32, 33). His words to David proved to be true when the king’s sons came trotting around the hill weeping loudly like the king.

While Amnon escaped justice, Absalom was not confident he would escape justice at the hands of the king; David himself had escaped justice for murdering Uriah. Absalom decided not to return home but to flee to the home of his mother, to the house of the king of Geshur. David mourned for his son, probably Amnon, every day (13:37). But after three years his thoughts had turned to Absalom, ‘and King David longed to go to Absalom’ (13:39).

‘The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son; the soul that sins shall die’ (Ezek 18:20). Sons often follow in the sins of their father, as we see with these two sons of David, but by the grace of God not every son follows his father in this way. David failed to deliver justice to the victim of his son’s rape, so his other son took matters into his own hands and murdered his brother. Was David crippled by his own sin? He should have known, as he wrote in the psalms, that when God forgives he washes us clean. Our place of course, is to learn, not judge.