



Do You Really Know the King?

A Study in Samuel

David and Tamar

2 Samuel 13:1-20

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith

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Read 2 Samuel 13:1-20.

Last week we considered the prophet Nathan speaking a divinely inspired parable to David to bring about David's repentance for his sexual sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah and murdering Uriah to cover over his sin. While God instantly forgave David's sin. However, David was told that there would be consequences for his sin. And those consequences included disaster from within David's own family. Time has passed and David is getting older, and the text starts on this horrible account of David's oldest son Amnon and his daughter from another woman, Tamar – who was Absalom's sister.

It is important to understand that the Bible is not like most religion's holy books. It was never airbrushed. The ugly stories were not edited out. The stories that reveal the ugly chaos that sin creates in lives is not skipped. The Bible does not hide it away. While we may be tempted to skip awful sections like this, we are not learning from the whole counsel of Scripture.¹ This morning, we will not skip this story. We will address it and consider it together. I won't try to format this by subjecting the text to some different structure. This morning, we will simply walk through the text with as much care as I can.

David was forgiven of his sin by the mercy of God. Yet the consequences of his actions are now catching up with him.

¹ There are two passages that are useful reminders as to why we spend time in Old Testament narratives such as 2 Samuel 13. The first one is Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and encouragement from the Scriptures." So we consider this passage in light of what Paul teaches us here. The second passage is 2 Timothy 3:15: "You've become convinced of this. You've known this from since you were a little boy – namely the sacred writings are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." The promise is that in reading both Old and New Testaments, the Holy Spirit of God uses the Bible to help us endure, to encourage us, to give us hope, and to bring us to a point of the understanding of salvation.

Alec Motyer shares a helpful picture of what repentance is when he says that it is like retrieving a rock that you've thrown into a pond. You are able to get the rock back, however the ripples will spread out around the pond even though the rock was retrieved.²

David's sin has been forgiven. But the consequences of his sin are now rippling out and crashing in on David and his children. We have seen David at his best in 1 Samuel and the early chapters of 2 Samuel. Back then he was a man after God's own heart. His heart displayed a love and devotion to God and His glory. But those days are far behind him in the past. Things are falling apart. Lives are being destroyed. And as David becomes an older man, he is sadly at the mercy of others, manipulated by others. He is really a shadow of his former self.

If it wasn't clear before, it is clear now after reading these verses in 2 Samuel 13. Sin brings disaster into human lives. To rebel against God and His word, to push God and his will and his word into the background, is to plunge deeply into the darkness of sin and broken chaos that sin brings. Sin devastates lives. It causes spiritual separation from God. I hope as we heard this passage read, we were repulsed by what we heard.

"...David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and David's son Amnon was infatuated with her." v.1

From the outset of the text, Tamar is identified as a secondary character. She is named as the sister of Absalom and the object of Amnon's desire. The Hebrew syntax here surrounds and silences Tamar with the names of Absalom and Amnon. "Absalom had a sister...Tamar...Amnon loved her." Her dilemma is palpable. As a woman with no recognized power of her own, she becomes the victim of the power struggle in which one brother is hungry for power and influence, the other for passionate pleasure.

She is beautiful because God made her that way. She is a royal princess, and her virginity would have been noted in her attire and also protected by her court. She would have worn the long sleeves identifying her as such. But despite her beauty, the story surrounding her is ugly and awful.

² Alec Motyer, *Treasures of the King: Psalms from the Life of David* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2007). Chapter 13

“Amnon was so frustrated to the point of making himself sick over his sister Tamar because she was a virgin, but it seemed impossible to do anything to her.” v. 2

The text tells us that Amnon “loved” her in the Hebrew. But infatuated is appropriate considering the rest of the text. He was obsessed with the prospect of something physical happening. He didn’t want to date her, to ask her out to dinner and get to know her during long walks on the beach. He wasn’t her love songs. He is tormented by the thought of her.

The text does not reveal in any way that Tamar was aware of how Amnon felt. Nothing here mentions her being on alert or sensitive to Amnon or his feelings or his intentions. Amnon is infatuated but there was something unattainable about her. He was sick because he “couldn’t do anything to her.” Again, her virginity would’ve been protected. There would have been ladies attending her. Soldiers guarding her. She would never have been alone. He had bad intentions. But he couldn’t get her. However, he also had a friend.

“Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, a son of David’s brother Shimeah. Jonadab was a very shrewd man, and he asked Amnon, ‘Why are you, the king’s son, so miserable every morning? Won’t you tell me?’ Amnon replied, ‘I’m in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom’s sister.’ Jonadab said to him, ‘Lie down on your bed and pretend you’re sick. When your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘Please let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare a meal in my presence so I can watch and eat from her hand.’ So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, ‘Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my presence so I can eat from her hand.’ David sent word to Tamar at the palace: ‘Please go to your brother Amnon’s house and prepare a meal for him.’” vv. 3-7

It isn’t always good to know that you’ve got a friend. It depends on the quality of the character of that friend. My grandpa was fond of saying, “Show me your friends, and I’ll show you your future.” Amnon’s friend was a cousin, David’s nephew, Jonadab. The Bible tells us that he was shrewd. He is a schemer and a planner. Jonadab notices that Amnon looks terrible. He looks awful. And he asks him as much. “You look awful. You’re the heir to the throne, why do you look like twenty miles of bad road?”

Amnon explains himself and the text uses a literary device to stress the aroused nature of his lust for his half-sister. The result is that his explanation of why he looks so awful gives the impression of a succession of faltering, gasping sighs, in which alliteration intensifies in the grip that his passion has over him.³

Jonadab lays out a plan. It starts with David. It involves the king. This means that people can say, “Well, David knew about it. He sent her over there.” Amnon does exactly that. And David does what his son wants, which he shouldn’t have done. He is manipulated by his son. And Tamar is an obedient daughter, which was the right thing for her to do.

We’re told in verse 8 that Tamar finds her brother sick and laying down. She makes food for him, and he watches her. You get a sense of something bad about to happen. Given the state of Amnon’s emotional well-being, we assume that her presence and the cooking and baking is enough to stir him. What are we supposed to see when Tamar is baking? We see her obedience to her father. We see her kindness to a sick brother. We see her skill in preparing the meal. We see her compassion to a person who doesn’t feel well. Amnon isn’t interested in those qualities. Only in her beauty and what he wants. Besides, he was consumed with what he was planning not with her actions.

In verse 9, Amnon orders everyone out. He wants all the servants out, including any who would have attended Tamar. Everyone is kicked out, leaving only brother and sister there. When Amnon has her alone, he asks her to come feed him. He wants her close enough to actually feed him with her hands. It is the first honest thing he has said to Tamar. At this point, Amnon is done with the charade. In verse 11 he reveals the true intent of why she is there: “*Come sleep with me, my sister!*” The Hebrew phrases here uses to imperative verbs that are consistently used to describe illicit sexual activities.

He grabs her forcefully as he demands this of her. Tamar’s response is impressive, and she desperately raises many objections. We see here that she is a woman of both integrity and intelligence. Three times she says no and lists obvious reasons. She tells him, “No, don’t violate me. We don’t do that in Israel. We’re God’s people, we know his laws, and we don’t act like these other people around us.”

³ P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *2 Samuel* (New York: Doubleday, 1984) p. 321-22

Then she says no again; “Don’t commit this outrageous act! Consider what it will mean for me. There is no place that I will be able to go to get away from this shame, from this humiliation. It will always be with me. And think about yourself too. You will be one of those outrageous fools in Israel – they won’t let you reign on the throne if you do this. You will ruin both of our lives.”

In what seems to be a final attempt to stop this from happening, she begs Amnon to go to David and ask him to arrange a marriage. If those practical reasons weren’t enough, marriage is not out of the question and under the proper procedures, soon enough they could be married, and this would work in Amnon’s favor. These objections are resounding indictments of Amnon’s demand. And they are also an indictment on David. Amnon summoned his forbidden sister in order to abuse her; the other summoned another man’s wife to abuse her.⁴

Tragically, he won’t listen. And verse 14 tells us that he refused to listen to her. And David’s sin has now come to rest in his immediate family.

With staccato-like precision and brevity, details of this deplorable act are recorded in vv.14-15. Three Hebrew action verbs come quickly with their objects: “*he overpowered her and abused her and bedded her.*” The final verb here in verse 14 reduces her as the victim to a mere object: “bedded her.” He dehumanized her, ravaged her, leaving her a “desolate woman.”

And then, in a psychological twist that sadly is common in events like this, the Bible tells us that he hated her. And that his hatred for her was even stronger than the lust he felt for her previously. And he orders her to leave, to get up and go. If his lust drove the earlier part of the story, now his hatred will drive the next.

Breaking the Israelite Law of God, he drives her away instead of marrying her.⁵ She begs him not to send her away, that this would be tantamount to a divorce and a greater shame than the violation. You can hear how desperate she is with the prospect of her shame, that she is prepared to stay with Amnon. If he were to kick her out now, she would be a desolate woman, done forever.

⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, (New York: W.W. North, 1999), xxii-xxiii

⁵ Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:28-29

She appeals to his humanity. Sadly, he has none of which to appeal to. But again he refuses to listen to her and calls a servant to kick her out. The Hebrew reveals that Amnon did not even refer to her as a woman, but a thing. “Get this away from me.” He kicks her out and then locks the door. An interesting detail. Was he afraid she was going to come back inside? By bolting the door he can try to control the narrative. She isn’t a woman who has been defiled by this horrible man and this terrible act. By locking the door he can communicate that she was a seductress and Amnon was the victim. He had to lock her out.

“Now Tamar was wearing a long-sleeved garment because this is what the king’s virgin daughters wore. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long-sleeved garment she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away crying out.” v. 19

This long-sleeved garment was a “richly ornamental robe” and the expression in Hebrew is the same used to describe Joseph’s coat of many colors.⁶ The Bible gives us clarity in the definition of the robe as what the virgin daughters of the king wore. It signified her status as an unmarried princess. Once she tears it, it symbolizes the ruin of her life. She covers her head with ashes in grief of what she has lost. A part of her has died and she acts as one in mourning, grieving what she lost. She covered her head and left, crying out in pain. This verse, 2 Samuel 13:19 is one of the most tragic and sad and emotionally stirring verses in Scripture.

You can picture her walking home. The misery and shame weighed her down. The loud wailing as she allows that grief cry to rise up. In a moment, her life is tattered and torn and tears. Absalom reappears and seems to have a rather good idea of what has happened. “Has your brother Amnon been with you?” Apparently, she answered in the affirmative. “Be quiet for now, my sister. Don’t take this thing to heart.” He is telling her to keep this quiet. Be silent. After all, this is a family matter. Amnon is her brother. Don’t let him break your heart. She lived as a desolate woman in Absalom’s house. What a sad ending to a tragic story. Tamar is done.

And what about David? Well, he got angry. But he didn’t really do anything about it. He didn’t punish Amnon. He didn’t take anything away. He didn’t send him away. I mean, what could David say? The apple hasn’t fallen too far from the tree.

⁶ Genesis 37:3

2 Samuel 13 shove sin directly into our faces. Not too many other texts remind us about the sinfulness of sin. Sin devastates lives. When people ignore God and His word, all sorts of horrible things are unleashed.

And where does that leave David and his household? The halcyon days of his former glory are long gone now. Things look hopeless. Amnon is horrible. Absalom is about to create his own disaster. David is seeing things descend into darkness. And it leaves us asking the question we are supposed to ask: “If David was the best, if he was the best man for the job, what can we do?” We need someone else. We need someone that has not been affected by the stain of sin. We need someone that has perfect righteousness. We need someone who is holy as God is holy. We need a perfect Messiah, a true King who is morally perfect, without any sin.

That King that we need is the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin devastates lives. It rips souls, families, even communities apart. David was a king who was tainted by sin. As was every king who would follow. Until Jesus. Jesus was the perfect, sinless Messiah. He was the King born to be our Savior. “For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”⁷ Jesus is the King we need. He is the Messiah that we need to forgive our sins because “he became sin who knew no sin that we might become His righteousness.”⁸

And He is putting together a kingdom that is actually full of people who were broken and devastated like Tamar but are now restored in Him.⁹ He is putting together a kingdom that is full of people whose lives were devastated by sin. King Jesus the Messiah is cleansing and healing the formerly wretched and rebellious sinners whose lives were devastated by sin. We are all sinners, but we can still be saved by grace. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, you can be cleansed and forgiven. And the God of love and mercy, grace and compassion can even begin to put the pieces of a broken life back together.¹⁰

⁷ Luke 2:11

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁹ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, Preaching the Word, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), p.349

¹⁰ I understand that this passage could be something that triggers memories, emotions, pain, and more in a life. If you need to talk to someone, we would love to encourage you in any way we can. We have wonderful and Godly men and women who can listen. They are trustworthy. If you need more help, we can recommend counselors.

A word from Dr. Jonathan Hartiens, PhD, about 2 Samuel 13.
CEO of Mountaineer Behavioral Health in Berkeley Co.

The Bible does not condone sinful reality by telling this story but reveals it. The story speaks to sin in multiple levels. The sin of Ammon, the sin of David's unwillingness to act when he felt righteous anger, and the resulting sin of a salon who took reactive justice into his own hands. The story reveals that sin does not discriminate and effects even Gods most prized leaders. The story also reveals the shame Tamar experienced and that the violation o was more painful to her than the physical act. Such is true for every woman who is violated. Lastly, the story reveals how much victims carry their shame in silence. The Bible remains silent about Tamar, how she coped, what happened to her. For many women, their shame is carried in silence for the rest of their lives. Not because they should but because the culture did not show compassion for such pain. We don't really see anyone who has such compassion, brings healing to such pain, and challenges the cultural norms until Jesus comes and responds to Mary of Bethany in Mark 14.

The solution to Tamar's situation is not in the Old Testament because the solution for sin is not in the Old Testament. The solution is only in the New Testament. That's what made Jesus' response so compelling. He responded to a woman who was a victim of sexual sin. It is only in Jesus we find the right response. It is only in Jesus we find a compassionate response. And it's only in Jesus we find a healing response. The story of Tamar doesn't end in 2 Samuel. It ends in the gospels.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

Has there ever been a time in your life when someone hurt your feelings and you never told them or anyone else about it? How did it feel to carry that alone, on your own?

If you were in church, did having a woman read the text change how you approached the text instead of Pastor Craig? If so, why do you think that was the case?

We all know how consuming our passions can be. What would you say to someone who asked you how to keep those passions, those feelings, under control?

The solution to Tamar's situation is not found in the Old Testament because the solution for sin is not in the OT. The OT points us to Him. You find the solution for sin in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. How did Jesus respond to a woman dealing with sexual sin in John 4 or in Mark 14? Only in Jesus do we find the right and redeeming response to situations like Tamar's.

The story of sin, Tamar's and ours, ends in the gospels because it ends at the cross. Have you ever carefully considered the lyrics of the song we sang, *The Cross Has the Final Word*? How do those lyrics encourage you?