



## Do You Really Know the King?

### A Study in Samuel

*David and Absalom*

*2 Samuel 13:21-39*

*Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith*

*on Sunday, October 30th, 2022*

## Devouring the Frozen Blade

Radio personality Paul Harvey once told the story of how Inuit hunters killed wolves:

*First, the Inuit coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood. Next, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh, frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder, the wolf licks the blade in the arctic night. So great becomes his craving for blood that he wolf does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue, nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his “own” warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more – until the dawn finds him dead in the snow.<sup>1</sup>*

This story graphically illustrates for us the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin. Philip Yancey once wrote, “Like a spiritual defect encoded in the family DNA, sin gets passed on in an unbroken chain.”<sup>2</sup> Our individual sins – our private hatreds and our angry passions – contribute to sin in our own families – both genetic and spiritual. Each of us contributes to this communal hatred that plagues human beings and constantly threatens to erupt at any moment in self-destructive anger. Sometimes even violence.

We see this clearly lived out in King David’s family. Last week we dealt with the terrible rape of Tamar by Amnon, David’s firstborn. This week, we will see how anger and vengeance will continue to build and spread. (read text)

## Absalom and David’s Response to Amnon

I don’t want to spend more time with the first twenty verses of 2 Samuel 13 again. We saw how Tamar was abused. We saw how Amnon violated her and despised her and then ruined her life.

<sup>1</sup> Chris T. Zwingelberg, quoted in *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal*, ed. C.B. Larson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p.146.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), p.83.

The text picks up here in v. 21 to tell us that David was extremely angry. Terribly upset. Who can blame him? His daughter was raped by his oldest son. He is furious. However, this section ends abruptly. We don't read about any discipline. We don't read how David's righteous anger manifested itself into punishment. We don't read how David sought out justice for Tamar. This abrupt ending acts as further indictment on David. He doesn't do anything about it. It seems likely that David's consciousness of his own guilt paralyzed him. How can he chastise Amnon in light of what David had done?

David appears to be the over-indulgent father, as he becomes a passive, silent sufferer throughout the rest of this narrative. Absalom, we're told, doesn't speak to Amnon at all. He hated Amnon so much, he refused to speak to him.

### **Two Full Years Later**

Next, we read two years pass. Absalom's hatred waits for two years. That is a long time to be patient and sit with hatred. That is a disciplined hatred. Absalom has to see his sister in his home every day for two full years. Two full years of seeing her, realizing what she's lost. She is a desolate woman and a young age. For two years, Absalom – whose name means “father of peace” – has to sit and struggle with David's unwillingness to do *anything* to Amnon. It is not hard to imagine how two years of this can push a person over the edge from anger into violence and vengeance.

And then he sets a trap. It is time to shear the sheep. When that happened, it caused a quick influx of income. Debts would be paid off. Shepherds would reward servants after the shearing. And they would have a massive celebration. Remember, this is part of David's family business, shepherding. Absalom is planning a massive celebration. His first step: invite David. David rejects the invitation. It is too much. Absalom presses him again. But David is resolute with his refusal. So, Absalom requests David have Amnon go.

“Why him?” asks David. “I didn't think you two were talking. Why do you want him to come?” David was quite probably aware of this chilly winter between his two sons. And you can catch on to his suspicion. Absalom ignores it completely. He brushes all that aside. “Dad, how bad would it look if I had all of your other sons there and not Amnon? Send him along.”

Once again, David is manipulated by one of his sons. Previously, Amnon manipulated David into having the king place his daughter and son in the same place. And now, David is again manipulated into placing Amnon and Absalom in the same place.

The plan is also simple. Get Amnon drunk and then kill him. Those are the orders Absalom gives his young men. Absalom then uses dignified, honor-based language to spur his men into doing something that is undignified and sinful. “Be strong and courageous, be valiant. Don’t be afraid.” This is what Moses and Joshua exhorted the Israelites to be. Be valiant. Be strong. Be courageous. Do not be afraid. That is the same language that Absalom uses to convince men to kill Amnon.

Let’s be clear, rape is roundly condemned in the Old Testament. There were clear punishments established exactly for that. However, murder was not that punishment. Absalom’s actions are completely unjustified. And just like David’s murder of Uriah, Absalom’s murder of Amnon also involves a secret plot and cold-blooded intrigue. And, like David with Uriah, Absalom has someone else do his dirty work for him and his servants kill Amnon, just like David’s plan had the Ammonites kill Uriah after Israel abandoned him in battle per David’s explicit command.

David killed Uriah out of the desire for self-preservation. He needed to cover up his sin. Absalom murdered Amnon out of hatred and vengeance.

### **Violence begets Violence**

The violent mistreatment of Tamar has resulted in further violence. Absalom takes fratricidal vengeance. At first the report is inaccurate as David first hears that all of his sons are dead. But that scheming, no-good Jonadab hot-foots it over to the king’s palace to be sure to report that only Amnon is dead and not all the rest of the sons. You see, Absalom had no interest in killing those other princes. They were decoys in order to lure in Amnon.

Amnon is dead and you hear the prophecy of Nathan echo again here: “The sword will never depart from your house.” Absalom leaves into exile into his maternal grandfather’s kingdom, beyond David’s authority and reach. He remains there for three years. David is incapable of administering justice in his own family and Absalom is unable to return home. This provides a prophetic evaluation of David and of all kings generally.

In considering all that has happened in a short span to David's family, we are also forced to consider, again, the full weight of sin in our lives. Especially the sin of anger and taking actions in some sort of revenge. We understand more clearly that even in those circumstances in which we can understand the presence of anger, such as at the beginning of today's text, we cannot condone or justify anger manifesting itself into violence and vengeance.

Violence and hatred. The Bible has a lot to say about that. That is what this text is about. Hatred that leads to violence. One of the reasons that God sent a flood in Noah's day was because "the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence."<sup>3</sup> Old Testament prophets were vigilant in their condemnation of violence, calling it a ruthless abuse of power.<sup>4</sup>

This text should be a warning to the all-consuming action vengeance and anger becomes. We lap it up, unaware that by consuming such anger, we are causing ourselves so much hurt and pain. Absalom's hatred and thirst for vengeance consumed him. None of his hate legitimized Absalom taking matters into his own hands in vengeance.

The Bible tells us clearly: "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay."<sup>5</sup> One day when God sets out to right his world, all of the injustices and hatreds, all of those attempts at vengeance by people will be dealt with by God in his perfect way and in his perfect timing. This isn't just a quaint little statement. "Vengeance belongs to me." It is understanding by faith that it does NOT belong to us. Be honest. When in your life have you gotten vengeance right?

You've been mad because someone did not do what you wanted them to do. Perhaps maybe they did exactly the opposite of what you wanted. How will you get them back? Maybe you will gossip about them. Maybe you will slander them. Maybe you will lie or exaggerate the truth to fit your own narrative. Maybe you will take a passive-aggressive route and go to someone else with your "concerns" about them, pulling someone else into your own distorted version of the truth. Be honest. When was the last time you decided to take matters into your own hands, and you did it completely right?

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 6:11

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:9; 60:18; Ezekiel 7:23; 45:9; Amos 3:10; Micah 2:2; 6:12; Habakkuk 1:3; 2:8

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 32:25

The Bible is clear. The Lord is clear. This is NOT our territory. Vengeance, revenge, getting even, getting someone back – we are NOT to do that. Because we tend to unknowingly hurt ourselves in the process.

I once knew a couple that were so angry at the pastor of the church that I worked at as a subordinate pastor. They were angry because they were convinced that the pastor didn't care about them or their friends or what was important to them. So, in what they so proudly described as a "clever act of silent protest," they decided to not attend worship and not give their money to the church until the pastor acted more in line with what they wished.

I expressed to them that in this anger, their sin of pride that drove them to this sin, blinded them and consumed them. I tried to explain that not attending only hurts them, not the pastor. I tried to explain that we don't give back to the Lord as a means of commentary. We give simply because the Book tells us to. I also told them that in my experience, God will part that money from them one way or another. We never really get vengeance right and the Bible makes it clear. It isn't our area. It doesn't belong to us. It belongs to God.

Was Absalom angry. Yes. Did he have a right to be? Yes. Did his anger blind him to the Scriptural pathways toward justice and reconciliation? Absolutely. It consumed him. Just like it can consume us.

In our hands, vengeance just becomes another way for us to express our own sinfulness. Absalom fled. Amnon was dead. Tamar was devastated. David grieved. The glory days of over. David isn't the young apologist out defending the Lord's honor and glory against the giant. Now he is an old man, easily manipulated by his sons to the point where he resigns himself and just says, "Bah, go ahead. Do what you want to do."

And what are we to think? This seems so repetitive. And it is. Purposefully so. The Bible is making it clear to us. All of these kings are no good. All are overwhelmed with sin. The focus roams all over the Old Testament looking to settle on a king that is the King that we need. And none of them are. And when we find one that we think just might be the right one, we get narrative after narrative reminding us that even the best of us are broken, sinful. It leads us to ask the question we are supposed to ask:

Where is the King that can help us overcome this painful thirst for sin in our lives? Where is the King who can bring life to our dead hearts? Where is the King who will set everything right and bring justice one day to every wrong? Who is *that* King?

The answer is, of course, Jesus. Only in Jesus do we find perfect love, perfect mercy, and perfect justice. Only Jesus can properly deal with vengeance. Love and justice are the only cures for our sinful anger and thirst for revenge. And love and justice meet one another in the shadow of the cross. It was there, out of His great love for us, that He died for our sins, making it possible for us to receive justification – salvation.

You don't have to duplicate Absalom's actions to realize that you share in that same sinful nature. Stop letting anger consume you. Stop seeking out vengeance. Stop trying to take matters into your own hands.

“Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds expressed in your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him.”<sup>6</sup>

You can trade that sinful anger, that sinful pride, that thirst for revenge for the righteousness of Christ. You can stop being consumed by sin, broken and bleeding spiritually, and become holy, faultless, and blameless. Won't you trust Jesus to do that for you today?

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<sup>6</sup> Colossians 1:21-22

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:**

What movies or TV shows or songs or books are driven by the idea of revenge?

Have you ever been hurt by someone and wanted to get them back? How did that make you feel?

Absalom had a legitimate reason to be angry with his father, David, and with his brother Amnon. But he sinned in his anger. What verses in Scripture teach us how to deal with our anger? What warnings can we seek out in Scripture in dealing with our anger?

There is an old song that encourages us to tell our problems and troubles to Jesus. The chorus encourages us that Jesus is a friend like no other. Why can it be hard for us to trust Jesus with our anger?

Have you ever been consumed by anger and revenge? What was it like? How did you get over it? Or have you? What was the process like for you?

David was easily manipulated. Our Heavenly Father is not. What Biblical truth about God confirms that God is not manipulated by our emotions?

How can our sin of anger contribute to the “ungrace” or sin of our families, churches, work environments?