

*Forgiveness in the Family* (2 Samuel 14:14)

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In our Scripture from the Old Testament, rape, murder, and now exile. What this must have done to David's heart! What had once been a happy family was now torn apart by crimes of the first order.

What a mess! It reads like a modern-day soap opera. This is a continual tale of mistake after mistake after mistake. Sin follows sin, wrong follows wrong, until it is virtually impossible to assign blame, yet that is what we most often desire to do: assign blame. Who is at fault? But that is not always easy. Some of you will remember when the father of Charles Manson wrote a book asking why, what went wrong, who could have prevented the seventeen murders. Let us take a few moments and look at the main characters, see how they acted, how each has a part of blame to assume, and in the process, discover principles for family relationships.

First, we have the sin of David. His sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah had taken place. Was it because of his guilt that David did not condemn Amnon as he should, or because Amnon was his firstborn son? Who knows? The result is the same; David did not punish Amnon for the rape of Tamar and, in so doing, sowed the seeds of bitterness and murder in the heart of Absalom.

How easy it is for us to overlook the seriousness of the sin of our family members! Far too often we make excuses for their behaviour and, in so doing, aid and abet their journey down the path of disaster. How many other deeds of Amnon or his brothers had David overlooked? How many times before had David ignored their wrong doing? We do not know, but we do know this: a life of disobedience and wrong doing does not begin with rape. David's vacillation gave Amnon license, and he took it.

Further, by not punishing Amnon as he should. David sowed a seed of resentment in the heart of Absalom. Here is a father who has lost control of his house-hold and can do nothing but stand in the shadows and watch his children rape and murder each other.

Can we learn a lesson at this point? Not only do we pay for our sins, our families do too. Because of his own guilt, David would not punish a sinful son and thus lost not only this son but Absalom as well. As parents, our duty to discipline

is not incumbent upon our own righteousness, but our ability to discipline often is directly related to our feelings of guilt.

Then there is the sin of Amnon. Surely, he must bear his blame. Rather than asking his father if he could marry his half-sister, something David might have allowed as Tamar suggests, he rapes her and then violently throws her away like some used goods for which he no longer has a purpose. There is no excuse here, and surely Amnon received his due when Absalom killed him.

Amnon is a character study in how either we will control our desires and emotions, especially what the New Testament calls “the flesh,” or else we will be controlled and destroyed by them. Prior to the first murder, God warned Cain, *and if you do well will you not be accepted and if you do not well, sin is lurking at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.* (Genesis 4:7). Or as in Romans 6:12, *Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts.* Either you will control your desires and passions or they will control you. There is no middle of the road.

Then there is the sin of Absalom. This is a lesson in bitterness and revenge. Absalom was so angry at Amnon that he did not speak to him for two years, but anger smoldered in his heart and he waited for a chance to get even. Absalom was guilty of murder.

Whenever we seek revenge on another, whether we are standing up for ourselves or for another, we are violating the will of God. *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.* (Deuteronomy 32:35). God in his wisdom knew the difficulty that demanding vengeance would cause, because it builds a cycle of revenge that spirals higher and higher with no limit or control. Therefore, God demanded that revenge be left to him and him alone. To seek revenge is to place ourselves on the level of the one who has wronged us, something we should never do. Revenge always begets revenge.

Absalom is also a study in failed forgiveness. When David allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem from exile in Geshur, he refused to allow him to come to his (David’s) house. What a shallow form of forgiveness! How often is our forgiveness like that? With our lips we forgive, but with our hearts we never forget, and we carry resentment and antagonism toward others deep within us, refusing to let it go.

True forgiveness always requires restoration and that is why true forgiveness is so difficult. In a short while, Absalom begins to undercut his father, and before long he fomented a full scale rebellion that only ended with Absalom's death, an outcome that David never wanted or saw coming. Our refusal to fully forgive and to restore the relationship will mean only greater pain in the future.

How can one forgive a deeply felt wrong? Only through the love of Jesus Christ and the power love brings. What does Paul teach us about love? *Love ... is patient, ... keeps no record of wrongs, ... Love never fails* (1 Corinthians 13:5,8). We cannot through our own resolve forgive and restore, but through the love of Christ we can. Here is the essence of the Gospel in the middle of the Old Testament: *Yet God does not take away life but plans that the banished one ways that the banished one may not be cast out from him.* (2 Samuel 14:14).

Where are you and your family today? Where are we as a worship family in this congregation, today? Is there any who needs forgiveness? Is there any here who need to forgive? Is there anyone here who needs to stop the pain of bitterness and retaliation? Do you need the forgiveness that Jesus Christ brings to have the love to forgive or to ask for forgiveness? It is available right now, this very moment, through Jesus Christ, who died that all might be forgiven: even me and even you. Amen.