Amnon and Tamar
2 Samuel 13:1-29; v37-39

We're going to look at a tragic episode in David's life. Tragic for him, but even more tragic for his daughter Tamar, and that's her rape at the hands of her half-brother Amnon.

And as we read this story, you may not notice it, but at no point does God get a mention. And in some ways that's fitting, because what goes on here really is godless. And when things like sex, and the desire for instant gratification, or power and getting your own way, or revenge and getting even, take the place of God in a person's life, or in society, then stuff like this happens. And in an age of MeToo, and the abuse of power, and the kick-back against that, I think this episode has lots to tell us about the root problem.

But the seeming absence of God is striking for another reason. And that is that, in reality, he's not absent at all. You see, we last met David in the aftermath of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. And in the fall-out of that, David experienced grace and forgiveness. But through Nathan God told him, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house' (2 Samuel 12:11). And what we're going to see is God's word beginning to come true, as David comes face to face with the consequences of his own sin, mirrored in his family.

Reading: 2 Samuel 13:1-29, v37-39.

We're going to look at each of the three men involved then at Tamar, and then at the answer to all this.

Amnon
Now Amnon is David's first-born son. He's heir to the throne, the crown prince. If nothing else happens, when David dies, Amnon will be king. And yet, look how the writer begins the story: v1, 'Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar.' Why begin with Absalom? Why not just say Amnon had a beautiful half-sister or David had a beautiful daughter? Because the writer is using this story to introduce us to Absalom, because it's Absalom, David's third-born son, who becomes the greatest threat to David's reign. And it's this event that becomes the catalyst for his attempted coup.

But then we meet Amnon. Verse 1 again, 'And after a time, Amnon, David's son, loved her.' Now, that word 'love' covers a whole range of meaning, doesn't it? You see, obsessed with Tamar. But not with her as a person. With her as a thing, as a body, as something to use: Verse 2, 'it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her.' Because that's what he wants, isn't it? To do something to her. Not be with her; not talk to her; but do something to her. And it becomes very clear what that something is.

And sexual temptation, and our current culture, frequently confuse love and lust, don't they? And Amnon wants her, but he knows he can't have her, so the writer tells us v2, he 'was so tormented that he made himself ill.'

Now, why was he tormented? I mean, if he doesn't think there's anything wrong with this why not just feed the lust in his thoughts? Why the torment? Because he knows, deep down, that this is wrong. But he keeps coming back to it, and there's this struggle going on, wanting something he knows he shouldn't want. But he wants it!

Do you think, as he entertained these thoughts of doing things to Tamar, that he ever imagined that it would end with him being stabbed multiple times and him dying in a pool of blood on a sheep field somewhere? I doubt it. Because temptation, that voice inside him, just told him it would be wonderful. Think of how it will feel, Amnon. Any risk is worth that kick, Amnon!

And temptation is always the same, isn't it. It never tells you the truth. It only ever tells you how wonderful it will be. You see, when your work colleague starts coming on to you, and temptation comes knocking, it never tells you that in 18 months time, if you do this, you're going to be sat alone in a one bedroomed apartment, with your wife and kids not wanting to know you; or that years down the line you'll still be dealing with the hurt and betrayal of your actions. It just tells you, 'look at his or her body' or, if the temptation is financial, 'look at the life you could live' or if it's academic, 'think of the respect you'll have'.

And it's precisely because temptation will never tell you the truth that you need friends around you who will. And Amnon had a friend. Verse 3, 'But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother.' And he sees something's eating away at Amnon, and when Amnon tells him what it is, what does Jonadab, his friend, do? You see, there are friends and there are friends, aren't there? And real friends don't encourage you to sin. They don't excuse your sin. They don't tell you how you can get away with sin. Real friends are prepared to say 'no' to you.

So, when Amnon said to him, v4, 'I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister' what should Jonadab have said? 'Amnon, no! She's your sister. You might be the son of the king; you might be heir to the throne, but there are some things you can't have. This is wrong and you need to repent.' And if he had, he would have been a much better friend. Instead, he calmly sets out for Amnon how he can play his father David, to get alone with Tamar, and do what he wants.

And Amnon does it. He feigns illness, has David send Tamar to cook his favourite food, sends everyone else out, has her come in, and grabs her. And repeatedly Tamar says 'no'. Verse 12, "No my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing." And it was and is outrageous. And yet it's done, in David's royal household. And that despite Tamar imploring him that the people of God don't behave like this, that he would shame her and, v13, 'you would be as one of the outrageous fools in Israel.'

Now, the Book of Proverbs is a collection of the wise sayings in use around this time. And alongside the wise man, Proverbs describes the fool. And a fool is someone who thinks they can live their life however they want, and treat their body, or others' bodies, anyway they like, or make sex, or power, or money, or the pleasures of life their god and it not have consequences.

But Proverbs says otherwise and Tamar knew that, but Amnon doesn't listen. Because, fools don't listen. And the crown prince of Israel, God's people, rapes his half-sister.

Why? Why does he behave like this? Well, the Bible's clear that sin affects every part of our lives - our drives, our passions, our reasoning. As St Augustine put it, our loves are disordered - we love the wrong things and we love them too much. And Amnon' does what he does because of the nature of his heart.

But there's also nurture. You see Tamar is his half-sister; Absalom his half-brother, and there are lots of other half-sisters and half-brother's to go with them. Why? Because, David has taken

multiple wives and concubines. And that's the home Amnon has grown up in. And Amnon is going to be king, and the example set to him of how kings behave is that you can have any woman you want.

But look what he experiences having raped Tamar? Verse 15, 'Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.' And he orders her out, v17, 'put this woman out of my presence.' This woman. Literally, 'put this… this thing, out'. And he bolts the door behind her. Now what is that? Well, firstly, Amnon's discovered that this thing he so wanted, doing something to Tamar, ultimately leaves him empty and hollowed out. Chasing idols always does, doesn't it. And so he discards her like the thing he has used her for. Secondly, internally he's shifting the blame. And we do that, don't we? You know what you've done is wrong, but you can't bring yourself to admit it, so you look around for someone else to blame, and Tamar is the only other person in the room. But thirdly, Amnon hates her because he hates himself. It's the self-loathing that comes in the aftermath of sin, and maybe you know what that feels like. And he attempts to transfer it to her.

And bolting the door behind her he wants this over. The problem is, it's only just begun.

Well, if that's Amnon, how does his father respond?

David
When one of our daughters was much younger she hurt her elbow and I had to take her to the emergency department. And this young, big, male doctor examined her. But instead of being careful and gentle, he was just rough. And I felt this rage rising up inside me.

Well, if that's how I felt over an elbow, look at verse 21, 'When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry.' Imagine that anger, when you discover your daughter had been raped, and raped by your son. And there is a right anger that can become the energy for change, and for justice, and for restoration, isn't there? So what comes from David's anger? Because the writer reminds us, he is 'King' David. He's the man responsible for ensuring justice is done in Israel. And he's the father, the man responsible for his family. So David bears a double responsibility for what happens next. So what does happen next? What does David do with his anger?

And the answer is… nothing. David *feels* anger, but he *does* nothing. The man who fought the giant fails to fight for his daughter, or for justice. Why? Well, firstly it seems that Jonadab, Amnon's so-called friend, and Tamar, both knew that David would bend the rules for his son and give Amnon what he wanted. So maybe David has a track record of over-indulging his first-born son and he can't bring himself to confront him.

But just as likely, David may feel that he has lost his moral authority, and with that his moral courage. He hears what his son has done to his daughter and anger rises up inside him, but he's impotent to act, because it all sounds so familiar to how he has so recently behaved. And so, David's leadership and fathering is crippled by his own sin.

And yet, not to act simply multiples sin, doesn't it? To leave justice undone is to compound the issue. And David's repented and been forgiven, and genuine repentance and being painfully aware of our own sin doesn't mean we don't speak out in the face of others' sin, out of fear of being a

hypocrite. It means that of all people we know the damage that sin does and why it must be confronted.

But David doesn't, and his failure to act leaves a vacuum, and Absalom fills it.

Absalom

So Tamar leaves Amnon's house and heads for her brother Absalom. And without being told, he just has to look at her to know what's happened. But listen to what he says, v20, 'Hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this to heart.' In other words, 'Tamar, don't let this bother you too much. He's your brother. Let's keep this in the family.' Now, what do you think of that? On the one hand you could see him as just another man trying to tell a woman sexual abuse is no big deal. But I don't think so. Absalom knows it's a huge deal. Verse 22, 'Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad, for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister.'

But if Absalom was trying to be compassionate and told Tamar not to take this to heart, he didn't follow that advice for himself, did he? Because, v23, for 'two full years', he does take this to heart. And the sense of injustice and hatred and bitterness grows. And if David, the king, won't act as king, he, Absalom, will.

Now, have you heard the expression, 'vengeance is a dish best served cold'? And maybe after two years Amnon thought he'd got away with this. But Absalom's vengeance is now ice cold, and like Amnon before him, he played his father, and has his servants murder him - just as David had murdered Uriah the Hittite. And the sins of the father are mirrored in his sons. It's tragic isn't it? So, in passing, if your dad set you a good example, why not thank God for him now. And if you're a parent, send up a quick prayer, 'Father I want to be a mum or a dad who sets an example of godliness to my kids, help me do that.'

Except there's a twist here, isn't there? You see, whilst Absalom was David's third-born son, his second born, Chileab, isn't mentioned after his birth, and commentators reckon he probably died in infancy. And that means that when Absalom has Amnon murdered, he is now heir to the throne. And listen to what he says to his servants: v28, "when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not fear; have I not commanded you?" His men know that killing Amnon is wrong. But Absalom tells them, 'don't listen to your conscience, listen to my command.' Now what is that? It's Absalom beginning to think and act as if he's above the law. Because, as we're going to see next week, Absalom has begun to want the throne for himself, he wants to be king, and if he can pull this off, it's his.

Amazing isn't it? Amnon wanted sex, and Absalom wants revenge and the power that will give him. And temptations don't change do they? And whilst you and I wouldn't dream of killing our brother - you'll face the temptation of assassinating someone's character, especially if it furthers your own position, just as taking out Amnon did for Absalom.

But fourthly, let's look at Tamar.

Tamar

And the writer deliberately sets up this contrast between Tamar, lovingly preparing Amnon's food and serving him, with Amnon lying on his bed and then using her. And though Tamar goes away shamed, arguably she's the only one who comes out with any dignity, isn't she? She's the only one

who speaks and acts as a member of God's people, as she pleads with Amnon to consider the moral and religious reasons not to do this; as she pleads with him to consider the consequences for his own life as well as her own.

But he doesn't listen. And as she leaves she puts ashes on her head as a sign of mourning, and she rips the beautiful robe that made her stand out as a virgin daughter, a princess, of the king, and she goes away desolate. Because who will touch her now? As she says in v13, while pleading with Amnon, 'Where could I carry my shame?' Where indeed?

I mean, who can remove her shame? And when we consider our own lives, as those who sin and have been sinned against, who can remove our shame? And who will change Tamar's ashes of a life destroyed for the oil of joy? And who will wash her clean and cover her with a new robe that says, your past is wiped away, you are made new, you're a beloved daughter of the king.

And as you read this story, don't you long for a king, who will come and do just that? A king who will fight for her? Who won't just burn with anger at sin, but who has the moral authority to act and bring about justice. Who won't just take vengeance by getting others to do his dirty work and kill for him, because it serves him, but one who'd risk his life in battle for her. And as you see her sitting desolate in her brother's house, don't you long for a king who combines that purity and hatred of sin and justice, with a compassion that wipes away tears and restores the broken?

Where could I carry my shame? Not to David, or to Amnon or to Absalom. So where?

Jesus, Son of David

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read from Isaiah 61: 'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour.' And whilst Jesus stopped there the passage goes on, 'and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.'

It's like a manifesto for every Tamar. And Christ is the king Tamar needs, the king we all need. You see, Amnon was Tamar's older brother - he should have protected Tamar, instead he disgraced her. But Christ comes as our true older brother. And instead of shaming us, and using us, at the cross he laid down his life for us, to take away our shame, the shame of every broken Tamar and every repentant Amnon, and every failed David and every vengeful Absalom. And at the cross, he wipes away our past, and in place of the ashes and wreckage of sin, he pours the oil of joy on our heads and in our hearts. And instead of carrying the torn and soiled robe of sin, Jesus takes that upon himself, and in its place he gives us the robe of his righteousness, that says, this is a beloved son or daughter of the king.

And it's as you understand deep in your heart who Christ is and what he's done for you, that he's the king and the bringing of justice, but he's also your saviour and restorer, that you'll worship him. And all these other passions, these things we're tempted to love too much, like sex or power, thinking they'll give us what we want, will fall into their right place.

So where can Tamar, where can any of us, carry our shame? To Christ, the better firstborn son, the king who acts for justice, the righteous God of vengeance, who alone has the power to turn weeping to joy, and ashes to oil, who clothes us with a robe of his love, and can set our disordered hearts right.