

David and Absalom

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Okay, so we're going to kind of do a whistle stop tour through a number of chapters. If you want to have a Bible beside you and flick through it, there's some Bibles at the side or if you want to do that on your phones, that's great.

It might be helpful just to keep an idea of even visually of where we're going. But my intention this evening is to remind all of us. Now, you might not think this from the passage that we're reading, but my intention is to remind us, same as in the words of that song, it's really to remind us how great Jesus is, how great it is to be a Christian, and how important it is to stick close to Jesus.

So maybe this evening you're struggling to stick close to Jesus. Maybe you feel like giving up. Maybe you're a bit bored and fed up with it all. And what I want to get across tonight from this passage is the importance of Him and sticking close to Him because it's dangerous ground being outside of Him.

It's a dark place outside of Jesus. And just want to really do that. I know it's an Old Testament and Jesus is not directly in this passage, but I hope we'll see what God is teaching us from this passage. I would really encourage you to go home at some time, not right now, in a little while, to go home and maybe read through that whole section from chapter maybe 12 or 13, right up to chapter 18.

[1 : 33] And if you've got your Bible online and it's got lots of different versions, maybe do it in the message or do it in the new living translation or one that's maybe slightly more paraphrased because it's, you know, it's a story.

And it's really great to read like a story. And it's just an amazingly powerful story. So if you do have time, do go back to the story.

But just as a backdrop, just to set the scene, I want to read a couple of verses that I'm not sure if Cori read them last week, but it was part of the chapter that Cori was looking at.

It's chapter 12. It's when Nathan rebukes David for what he'd done with Mashi'ib and we saw that the rape and the murder and everything went on with that. So it's 2 Samuel chapter 12.

And can you look back at verses 10, where Nathan brings the message from God to David because of what he's done? He said, now therefore verse 10 of chapter 12, the storage shall never depart from your house because you've despised me and have taken the wife of your eye that hath hath hath to be your wife.

[2 : 42] God says to the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun.

For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun. David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, the Lord has also put away your sin.

You shall not die. For the less, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you will die. Nathan went to his house.

And that's really the context of the rest of the whole story of David and Absalom. And it's not pleasant reading. It's not easy to read.

It's difficult. What we see, what David went through, it is really significant, his laziness, his lust, his rape, his murder, the cover-up, the exposure by God, the forgiveness, the redemption, and the consequences are all spoken of in these chapters.

[3 : 53] And it's really the unfolding of what David, or what God says through Nathan to David. He's forgiven, but there's consequences for what he's done in this life.

And so we go into chapter 13, very quickly. Chapter 13, Amnon, David's eldest son, the heir to the throne, his mother is a Henneman.

And he has this unnatural desire for his half-sister, Tamer, and he must have her. And so he's so arranged things that he can take her and he rapes her.

And Tamer is his half-sister, whose mother is Maaka, one of David's other wives. It's a brutal, ugly, lust-fuelled, hate-filled chapter.

God isn't mentioned in it. But at the second half of the chapter, we see the result of what Amnon had done in Absalom's response. From Absalom's, his half-brother, Tamer was Absalom's full sister.

[4 : 58] And he hated Amnon for what he did. And there's two years of it all bubbling up inside him until he gets the opportunity to lure Amnon into an ambush, gets him drunk, murders him, and then flees on the run, just like his dad before him, except David was on the run from Saul.

Now Absalom was on the run from his own dad, David. And then chapter 14 kind of unfolds it more, so you've got, it's like Game of Thrones, chapter 14.

Who's in charge? Who's on the throne because who's running the show? Is it Joab who's the commander of David's army? Is it Absalom in exile, pulling the strings? Or is it this woman from Tekoa who Joab asks to go and speak to the king to try and get the king to bring Absalom back into the country?

It's quite interesting, verse 14 and verse 13, it's this woman, it's wise women from Tekoa who says when she told her story, the woman said, why have you planned such a thing against the people of God?

For in giving this decision, the king convicts himself in as much as the king does not bring his banished one home again. And this woman told a story to try, it was kind of like a parable story, but like Nathan's story to David earlier on and said, and then said, really, you're the guy, why don't you bring your son Absalom home from exile if he's forgiven?

[6 : 29] And it starts this movement to have Absalom come back into the nation. So Absalom returns, the return of the great pretender.

And yet David doesn't speak to him, he's kind of outside the city. And then verse, if you go to chapter 14, just follow with me because it makes it slightly easier, 25 and 26.

Absalom comes back to Israel. And we're told all Israel was there. In all Israel, there was no one as much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom.

From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head, I'm feeling very envious here. For at the end of every year, he used to cut it. When it was heavy on him, he cut it and it weighed the hair of his head, 200 shekels by the king's weight, mine's about an ounce and a half. And there was born to Absalom, three sons and one daughter whose name was Tamar.

[7 : 28] He called his daughter after his beautiful sister. And it's interesting, isn't it? He's just the kind of man that Israel as a nation would have wanted, wasn't it?

He's the Saul-like man. He's this great, beautiful, golden, long-haired guy with a six-pack and a tremendous physical appearance.

And the people loved him and he had his eye on the kingdom. So he used to sit at the gate of the city and he would get the people, he became one who the common people loved because he would speak to them and he would deal with them and he would judge the issues that they had just like the king should do.

And because he had his eye on the kingdom at the cost of his father's life. That chapter, God's hardly mentioned. And then chapters 15 to 17 take that story further on where Abimelech, the poster boy who's working the crowd, steals their hearts and the rebellion against David happens.

And it's an unfolding scene of loyalties and treachery and friends and enemies. There's a coup d'etat and Absalom takes over and he's in the palace.

[8 : 46] And what does his men, what does his advisors recommend? Go sleep on the roof with David's concubines. Just show who's the boss, show who's in charge, show who's the one that is now the king.

And he does that if you remember chapter 12. David then is on the run. King David, he's on the run like a fugitive, vilified, humiliated, mocked by people who see him.

And yet and yet in all, in all the poverty of David, in all the poverty of his leadership, in all the mistakes he'd made, in all the folly of what he was doing.

Chapter 15, verse 31, he cries out to God. His closest advisor, Ahithophil, has turned coat and become an advisor to Absalom and he's a smart cookie.

He's really sharp. He's a great advisor. He always gives brilliant advice and David says, oh Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophil to foolishness.

[9 : 53] And in that cry, God answers and ordains victory for him. David catches a break as he cries out to the living God.

And chapter 18, which is the one we eventually read the last part of it, David fights back. He sends out an army and as I said, as he sent out this army because he knew he was probably going to defeat Absalom and his men, he says, and this would, it was a crazy thing to say.

In many ways, not as a father, but as a commander, as a king, he said, just look after Absalom. He said, my boy, take care of him.

Keep him alive. And of course, what happens is that Absalom is riding on a donkey and he happens to come across David's men and he's fleeing from them and he flees into a forest and a forest, not a good place to go in a horse or a donkey, and he gets his head caught in the bow of a tree, probably his hair.

Remember all that heavy hair? Catches him and he's left hanging from the tree, but he's still alive. And the soldiers who go there say, well, we're not going to touch him.

[11 : 09] He's the Lord's anointed. He's the son of the king. But Joab says, come on, get your act together. Stabs him three times and he's thrown into a field.

Pile of stones put up on him, which is really the death of someone in disgrace. No legacy, just a cursed death and a sad memorial.

No sons left, presumably his sons died. We're told he had two sons and Tamar, Tamar, his daughter, but they must have died. And then David mourns. His tragic grief, isn't it?

Isn't it tremendously powerful that last verses that we read? His estranged son, his estranged son who hated him. And David and all is really kind of right through this kind of weak and passive.

Joab takes more of a lead in him. Others show more grace than he showed. And there's real guilt, I think, in his cry, real guilt about the reality of the terrible consequences of his own actions, allowing his own love for himself to smother, to blind and deceive him.

[12 : 20] He knows the covenant God has forgiven him. And yet he senses, what have I done? What have I done with all the blessings and grace that were showered upon me?

He never, can I say again, I don't think he ever gets higher than the way he deals with Mephibisheth in the chapter before the Bathsheba one.

He never shows more covenant love, more grace. And yet he returned to the Lord again and again because he was a man after God's own heart.

And who am I today to stand in judgment on David with all the much greater light and knowledge of God and the gospel and Jesus Christ that I have?

But yet he's a warning to us, even though he's the great King and the Son, the man after God's own heart. So what do you, what, quickly, what do we think God is teaching us?

[13 : 23] Through a passage like this, I think there's a few things. The first thing I think is that God's grace is not for good people, okay? Grace is not for people who think that they're good people.

David's not a hero in this story. He's fallen and he stumbles and he fails. And he's not the King that humanity needs. Obviously, we've seen that points forward to a greater King.

But the gospel and grace is not for good people because each of us, every one of us here share David's DNA, every one of us, we all share the potential to send the way David sent.

If you have time, look up the discredited Stanford Prison Experiments of the 1970s, where, I'll not explain it, but they're very interesting because ordinary people are put into an experimental situation where they're either prisoners or prison guards and they're all very balanced, ordinary people, none with psychological or violence issues.

And when they're in a certain situation, and that's to act in a certain way, all kinds of darkness and blackness comes out in the experiences. This week, a 21-year-old Russian soldier was found guilty of war crimes shooting an innocent man in the head.

[14 : 49] Was he a beast? This 21-year-old Russian soldier? I don't think so. He was a 21-year-old man. That's younger. That's the same age as a lot of the guys here.

Probably had a fairly ordinary upbringing. And yet in the circumstances he finds himself in, this darkness that can be in any one of us comes out and he acts in that kind of way.

The reality is that darkness is in each of us. And we give thanks, as I did today at the beginning of the service, for God's restraining grace that allows us to live relatively normal lives because of His goodness.

And yet Romans 3, 23, all have sinned, all have sinned in the fall short of the glory of God. We brush over that like it's, oh yeah, I know we've all sinned. We all have this potentiality within us. And David's visible horrors expose the secret lusts, self-pity, hatred and pride that we so often harbor in our lives, which never reveal themselves in open contempt because of God's mercy, but God sees.

[16:00] And the greatest horror is to think that we are good enough for God in ourselves and that we don't really need Jesus.

So God's grace is not for good people. But God's forgiveness, secondly, doesn't rule out repercussions, at least in this life.

And I think that's a very solemn truth for us that we may be forgiven and we will be forgiven always as Christians when we come back to God. But the consequences of what we do may still have an impact not only on our lives, but the lives of people around us.

Because other people might not forgive us, for example. And our example might bring a destructive reality into other people's lives because sin is often learned behavior.

When people see the way we act, they may follow our example. If you look at Amnon and Absalom, the kind of things that happened, lust and rape and contrived murder, were all things they had seen in their father.

[17:09] They had seen it in his life. Now they would have known he was forgiven as well, but nonetheless they saw what he did. And David himself lost three of his sons.

He gave his sons as a direct result of what he did, even though he was forgiven. His child of Bathsheba, Amnon, his firstborn and Absalom, his beloved at one level.

Although there was a strange relationship, love-hate relationship between them, maybe love and not sure what to do with him.

And David's part anger and hatred on Absalom's part, but he lost three of his sons. He had a divided kingdom. So much disaster in these, it's really horrible chapters to read in many ways. And the New Testament reminds us, you know, in Ephesians 4:30 we can grieve the Holy Spirit. One Thessalonians 5:19, we can quench the Holy Spirit so that we can live our lives in such way that we receive forgiveness, but we don't recognize the cost of that forgiveness and we quickly stumble back into sinful living.

[18:24] But our forgiveness isn't cheap and God isn't mocked. And we can destroy others by our attitudes and by our responses and by the way that we live our lives.

We can never say, you know, I'm just going to sin a little bit more so that grace can abound. That's a popular one in the New Testament and it's spoken about. We can't do that. That's not what we're able to do.

And that is misunderstanding of ourselves and of God's love for us. Forgiveness can never be a license to live selfishly.

Have you ever heard of a vomitory? Sorry to be so crude. But a vomitory, I think it's called a vomitory, was a channel that was down the side of a banquet hall in Roman times so that those who were engaged in the banquet could eat themselves sick, vomit down the vomitory so their stomachs were empty so they could fill them again with more food.

Gluttony, greed, really, vomitory. So that's what we're doing if we despise grace. Grace is not forgiveness that empties ourselves of our sin in order that we can fill our lives up with sin again.

[19:42] That is not what we're called to do. Grace is to transform us into changes and an example in our home and our life and our private thoughts and our understanding.

Either it's building us up and building others up and building our relationship with God up or it's destroying it. We're called to put sin to death because it destroys.

It's a destructive reality. And you know, we struggle with that in our lives because we don't feel that that's the case. But what path am I on and what path are you on this evening?

Do we understand ourselves and what God is telling us through the story of David when we choose to grumble and choose to drink too much or to watch porn or to gossip or to accuse God or to be prayerless to me.

Just say, I can forgive him. I'm a Christian, it's okay. I'll just carry on doing this because I'm quite enjoying it and I'm forgiven. Is that true love? Is that how we should live our lives?

[20 : 44] In many ways, the word always exposes us to drive us back to the safety, the warmth and the light and the hope of Jesus Christ in the gospel.

Because I think it's possible to know peace with God through Christ and through His forgiveness, but not the peace of God felt in our lives.

How many of you feel the peace of God in your life? We know the peace with God because of what Jesus has done. We know it theologically and I'm right with God because of what Jesus has done in the cross.

I know peace with God. I'm right with God through Christ covered in the blood of the Lamb. Do you know the peace of God on a day-to-day basis?

Because the choices we make will create the barrier to a felt peace. We might have ontological peace. We might have peace with God at that level because of what Christ has done, but we can sometimes not feel that peace because we're making the wrong choices.

[21 : 45] We're saved but we're drifting and we're drifting into the wrong places and doing the wrong things and making the wrong choices so that we don't feel His peace and we don't sense His peace in our lives.

And there are consequences for the choices. If we're selfish or self-centered or proud and we show that and we're divisive.

Many things that Corey was talking about this morning within the church family, these things are insignificant to us so that we sin consciously and deliberately.

If we're shutting out God, we will know this peace, felt this peace in our lives. So we need someone better than ourselves always and we need someone better than David.

And that's the great thing about David as he points us to the one who is better than himself, the living God. Have mercy on it. You go back to that great Sam connected with his response to sin with Bathsheba.

[22 : 57] Sam 51, have mercy on me. Oh God, according to your steadfast love, your hesed, your covenant mercy. And that is so significant for us because we find in Christ the greater and better King.

And we're called to follow Him and His light and His love and His goodness because Christ is the better King because He is unlike David truly good.

And you know, that matters. It matters in your relationship with Christ that you understand and that I understand that He is truly good. He's not like David.

It matters because we accuse Christ sometimes of not caring, of being selfish, of setting an example that we don't understand, of failing on His promises and we're angry with Him.

We say He can't be trusted and that He's a failed King. We're saying we are better than Him.

[24 : 00] But Christ can never just be a better version even at human level of ourselves.

We saw it tonight. He's truly human and He's truly God. And as God, He lives this totally sinless life and thought word indeed filled with perfect love and utterly good motives.

So when we trust in Jesus, we're trusting in one who has no secrets in, no duplicity, no lies, no greed, no lust, no envy, no bitterness. And He lived that life as God in order to be our substitute as we know.

But you simply can't look elsewhere for the kind of life and love that we need and Savior that we need. And I think it changes the way we pray because we're praying to someone who's utterly and completely good and is our Savior and Lord who died, who paid the price for our sinful choices even though He had none.

He made no sinful choices but He paid the price for ours. And it's interesting when Jesus is born, Simeon the prophet says to Mary, a sword will pierce your own soul too.

[25 : 27] And the sword that pierced her soul was seeing her son on the cross himself bearing the sword. The sword never left David's house.

And we had that in 2 Samuel 12, the sword will not leave your house. And it didn't leave right up to the crucifixion because the greater king was dying for sin but not for his own sin.

And it not God's wrath not being poured out because of his life but because of our lives. And he was dying in our place and he takes the sword of God's judgment voluntarily, willingly, lovingly so that you and I don't take it.

And so on the cross you've got parallel heart cries, don't you, of two very different kings. Billy kind of alluded to it in his prayer. David, he said, words that we read at the end of chapter 18 kind of in guilt with love lost and a degree of self-pity, unable to bring his son back or even to take his place even though he wanted to and that Jesus on the cross, Sam 22 in innocence cries, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

With overwhelming love and self-denial bearing our forsakenness, taking our place, doing what David couldn't do, die in place of his son, take his place.

[27 : 03] He becomes the one who dies in our place. He takes our place to restore us to himself in resurrection. So my prayer tonight for myself, much more so and for you also, is that we grasp how good Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

He doesn't want us to follow him because it's harsh or oppressive or rigorous or legalistic. He wants us to follow him because he is life and love and goodness.

And he wants us to learn that sin is something we should hate. You know and I know we're attracted to it so much and yet it's roots are selfishness and destructive.

And you today and me today and tomorrow, we will all have choices to make. We will all be making choices and you and I need the wisdom of God today and tomorrow to make the right choices so that we recognize that he wants to keep us from destruction and he wants to keep us from a life that has miserable consequences and he wants us to live a life of blessing and of grace and an example to our children, our neighbors, our colleagues for good, not for ill, but for good.

And he wants life, he wants us to be built up, not knocked down. And he wants that for us all as a church as well, the way we speak to one another, we think about one another, we talk about one another, we act towards one another positively, graciously, Christ in a Christ-like way so that there are positive consequences and fruit bearing for our lives and that we're not those and this is a verse that I don't really understand, we're not really like those who escape to heaven through the flames with our works all being burnt up.

[29 : 03] We don't want that and Christ alone as we stick close to Him, stick near to Him and turn towards Him gives us that.

It's good, it's tough, it's not easy, but it's good. And that's what the gospel is all about. Let's pray.

Father God, we pray that You would help us. It's difficult chapters that we've been reading. Difficult to read, painful for parents, for children, for people like us to read this story and to see so often it reflected in lives around us, abusive lives, hurtful lives, death, misery, separation, division, yet so often we treat sin lightly and we smooch with it and we caress it and we keep it close and we shrug our shoulders and say, well, we're forgiven anyway, I can just pray in a Friday evening.

Lord help us to see Your love and see the cost of Your love and see the healing power of Your love and the light of Your love and that You're there for us, You love us, that You want us to turn towards You, You're like the prodigal father as we saw this morning.

And help us to see You in that way, help us to deny ourselves our sinful selves and our longing to be on the throne. Help us we pray and guide us and point us daily, hourly, minutely towards Jesus Christ.

[30 : 36] Amen. Okay, we're going to finish with the version of the Psalm 91, which is a great Psalm of talking about the protection and love of God and the dwelling place that we should have is in His presence and that's what we're looking at in our lives to be in His presence as believers.

So, Psalm 91, we'll stand together and sing it.

The dwelling place is almost high, my refuge and my fortress.

When plague and pestilence draw nigh, I'm hidden in His presence. When terrors fall and arrows fly, His shield will be my safety.

When stones across my pathway lie, On angels' wings I'm carried.

[32 : 00] When dwelling places are almost high, I present help in danger. I rest secure in love's pure light, Beneath my master's favour.

He freed me from the foulest net, Where sin and shame had bound me.

Deceived I made my refuge there, Till fearless He came for me. Wonderful, powerful, my hope and my defender, Mighty God Emmanuel, my dwelling place forever.

My dwelling place is God most high, I'll never seek another, For I am His and He is mine.

My heart He'll keep forever. I know the name on whom I call, He promises to answer.

[33 : 31] When life is satisfied by His soul, And grounds me with His pleasure.

Wonderful, powerful, my hope and my defender, Mighty God Emmanuel, my dwelling place forever. Wonderful, powerful, my hope and my defender, Mighty God Emmanuel, my dwelling place forever. I felt we needed to go down to the hall to sing some of that one, it was so low. But then we come up, we should have gone into the galleries to sing. Maybe there's a spiritual thing there about being low and then going high.

It's amazing. Well done. Peace be to my brothers and sisters and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

[34 : 49] And all God's people say, Amen. Please be seated, just a couple of things. Can I remind you the engine room on Wednesday evening will be on Zoom because of the assembly and we'll not be able to meet here.

It's normally the assembly week is normally the week of a city group which works out well but every five or six or whatever years it's a later week which messes up our diary anyway.

But that's fine. So it's on Zoom. So if you can join the details will be on the Wednesday email.

Tonight can I just ask you to stay behind those who can, those who feel strong enough to stay behind and do some heavy lifting.

So we're going to have to bring all the tables from behind the screen in the moderator's gallery down here and set them up for the assembly tomorrow, starting tomorrow evening.

And also we're going to set out all the tables that we have, the long tables with the legs that flick out. They're going to go downstairs in the hall for the cafe which is on during the week, the assembly cafe.

[35 : 55] So if any of you won't come for lunch, you're very welcome. The assembly is also a public meeting. So if you're interested at all just to wander in, you can sit in the galleries and watch what's happening at the assembly.

And then do remember Sparkle Sisters which is happening here on Thursday evening. So we hope that the assembly will finish on time, at lunchtime on Thursday, so that we can set up Sparkle Sisters for the evening which is great.

So this evening maybe if you're sitting in the middle you could like the man at Jesus' heel do roll up his mat and to go home in the Sabbath. You can pick up your chair and put it in the side and so the whole middle bit is cleared and we can put the tables there and then put some of the chairs back.

So but thank you for your help if you're able to help and do go in peace, card your heart, love God and love other people well.