

**FAMILY HEARTBREAK****2 Samuel 13-17**

**Intro:** Kathy and I were once part of a training event in the area of sexual abuse when a speaker said something I'll never forget. The average family is dysfunctional. He never presented statistics to prove his statement and I remember thinking that my family was NOT dysfunctional so he certainly wasn't talking about us. But the more I rolled it around in my mind in the hours, days, and years since – it doesn't actually need statistics – the average family IS dysfunctional! My own included – even if we did refer to ourselves as the Super Race. In fact, I reflect on it, my family of origin was and is dysfunctional because we're human and because sin has too often reigned supreme.

Since June we've been talking about an ordinary man whom an extraordinary God elevated to leadership of his Chosen People. This man was David was extremely flawed – but God used him anyway. This is because David was a man after God's own heart. He was flawed but he always came crawling back to God after his many failings because he acknowledged his fallenness and knew his place before a Holy God. He was a man after God's own heart because in his heart of hearts he wanted to be holy like his heavenly Father.

This man after God's own heart was the product of a dysfunctional family. Just think waaaay back to June 2<sup>nd</sup> when we looked at David's anointing by the Prophet Samuel: David's father Jesse was certain that the next king of Israel was definitely not his youngest son who was out in the fields tending sheep. In fact Jesse was effectively forgetting his own son. That's dysfunctional! And look at the way David's brothers (especially his oldest brother, Eliab) treated him when he went to the field of battle where the enemy champion, the giant named Goliath, was defaming Israel, its cowering king Saul, and worst of all, their God. Eliab was a grown man, in the army of Israel, and yet he sounded like a petulant ten year old when he asked David, "*Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?*" 1 Samuel 17:28b. That's dysfunctional!

It turns out that the apple of dysfunction didn't fall far from the gnarly dysfunction tree. And despite the fact that he was such a man of God, David's own family was a prime example of terrible dysfunction and it led to heartbreak upon heartbreak and tragedy upon tragedy.

That is what my message is for this morning. It's a heavy and difficult message to preaching and, if you followed my suggestion and read 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 13-17 over the past couple days you know why. These five chapters are full of heartbreak. In fact you could just call it a train wreck, except there weren't trains back then. One commentary I have entitled this portion of David's life with "THE TRAGEDY OF DAVID'S FAMILY" and then he proceeds with "*Here is a very human, intimate, and unvarnished account of David's family.*" Well, I would say so!

Now as I pointed out in my email to you on Thursday – I'm preaching this verse by verse. I'm also not pointing out all the things we can learn from these painful chapters. There are sermon upon sermon on murder and revenge and political intrigue here – but I want to look at the heartbreak one family experienced and hopefully we can learn from it.

Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22 – (This is not on the screen because of its sheer length)

**No matter how right it seems, if it's wrong it can't be right**

- David's oldest son – the crown prince and presumably, David's successor, Amnon, was passionately in love with his half-sister Tamar. She was a virgin, which made her available for marriage, but the problem was, no matter what, it was just not right. You can't make right what is wrong – no matter what it is.
- Father Abraham was actually married to his half-sister Sarah so there was ancient precedent. And it may have been that this kind of thing would have been acceptable in surrounding cultures, but for the people of God, it was not. Because since the days of Abraham God had delivered the Law via Moses and in that law Leviticus 18:9-20 and Deuteronomy 27:22 specifically forbade it. In fact, the penalty for it was death.
- The truth was Amnon was bent on seduction and not marriage. Carlos Santana had a song quite a number of years ago that included some words that might describe Amnon:

*I had a dream but it turned to dust  
And what I thought was love  
That must've been lust*

- Amnon may have been moping around lovesick, but really it was unbridled and evil desire. In the end he raped Tamar and there was no love involved at all. F. B. Meyer refers to it as *an infamous passion*. No matter how you describe it, it was awful. His conduct shows absolutely no concern for the stigma attached to what he did to his sister. Worse yet, just like his father, there was sexual immorality which led to murder.
- Meyer goes on further to say that *it seems difficult to believe that this was the home life of the man who wrote the Psalms*. But even a man who was after God's own heart, had some skeletons in his closet and that came home to roost and the heartbreak of David's family ramped up. His own thoughtless pursuit of what was forbidden (his blatant adultery with Bathsheba) was mirrored in his son's horrific actions. Meyer says, "*None of us can limit the far-reaching harvests of the seeds that we drop upon the flowing stream.*"
- Our kids are watching. Our kids are learning.

### **Our response to family heartbreak is key**

- That's a no-brainer, I know. But what I mean is our response will either bring healing and resolution or more heartbreak.
- David perpetuated the issue because in his anger, he did nothing. Maybe he felt responsible – he should have – he had sent his beautiful daughter into the hideous situation in the first place. My heart breaks to read of Tamar's desolation. She was ruined by a disgusting and violent act and she went into mourning taking off her beautiful royal clothes and putting on the rags of widowhood. Her brother Absalom, who was devastated for her, took her into his home – and we don't read anything more about her. It was a picture of the waste of womanhood that has characterized all of history where they are little more than objects and playthings. As a dad and a granddad this rips me up.
- Maybe it ripped David up too but all our text says is, *When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry.* 2 Samuel 13:21. That's all David?! Really?! You're king! You can take care of these kinds of things. No! You're Dad, you NEED to take care of these things. But David didn't.
- In his anger, Absalom did nothing as well, not yet. He was biding his time. Dad didn't take care of it. Nobody took care of it and his beloved sister suffered for it. Our text says, . . . *Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar.* 2 Samuel 13:22. He was justified in his anger. Maybe he could even be excused for his hatred of his half-brother, but he was bent on murder.
- But that was wrong too. The sin of murder doesn't make the sin of rape go away. Ben Philbeck writes, "*The Kingdom of Israel was not to be entrusted to one who would use raw power to pursue his goals irrespective of the rights of others. This, of course, was precisely the issue with which David had so often struggled in his utilization of power. David, however, had been quick to confess guilt and to seek to make amends when confronted with his error. Amnon, on the other hand, arrogantly expelled Tamar after abusing her and stubbornly refused to honor the requirements of the law prescribed in such cases. Even had he lived, Amnon was obviously unfit to rule over Israel since he could not adequately control himself.*"
- Yes, David's heart was breaking, but ignoring or overlooking the problem does not make it go away. In F. B. Meyer's words . . .

### **We need to deal sternly with our Absaloms**

- But David missed his chance so Absalom went about wreaking the vengeance that his father could have prevented. Listen (Read 2 Samuel 13:23-39)
- The penalty for Amnon's sin was death. Still David did nothing. One of his sons, Amnon – the successor to the throne of Israel, was murdered by his brother, Absalom, who was the next in line to the throne. David's legacy was deteriorating right before his eyes. He was completely blowing off his responsibility. The boy who had decisively confronted and defeated Goliath was incapacitated by a family squabble. More than a few would say that David's conscience and memory of his own gross sin made him spineless in the face of his children's sin. Meyer puts it in almost poetic words with "*Ah, conscience doth make cowards of us all!*"
- Absalom waited and planned and schemed and strategized – and finally he got his vengeance. He waited for sheep shearing time which was a festive and celebratory time in Israel. It's a time of togetherness and fun like our own apple butter making time or like our Pennsylvania Dutch tradition of butchering hogs on New Years Day. Everybody was celebrating and everyone's guard was down. Amnon was murdered by

Absalom's henchmen and David's family heartbreak exploded again as he thought, at least for a short while, that all of his sons had been killed.

- Absalom got vengeance and he fled to his mother's homeland. And David just let him do it. He had connections. He could have dealt with it. As the head of the household he needed to deal sternly and decisively with his family, but he didn't.
- Absalom was in exile. David missed him. Absalom's political aspirations grew. David's heartbreak would only get worse and we will talk about that next week.

**Conclusion:** Yes – this was a dysfunctional family extraordinaire. And I know you are wondering what the take-aways are in this sad, sad tale?

Here are some:

The Bible shares the story of God's people with warts and all. David's life was a soap opera that Hollywood can only dream of – you can't make this stuff up – it's right here.

God used these people mightily and he does the same with us.

What we come up against in our own lives and in our own relationships may seem insurmountable when we are in the midst of them. But as we look in on situations like this ugly saga in King David's family we can prayerfully ask God how would have been the best way and the holy way to handle it.

Communication was totally left out of this situation. David, who cried out to God with great eloquence in his Psalms was seemingly silent in dealing with his children's choices. Philbeck says this, "*Few personal differences are resolved when the principals isolate themselves from each other. Communication is essential if reconciliation is to take place. It would seem that David should have punished Absalom severely or forgiven him completely. In any case, the middle ground was totally ineffective.*" David did nothing and his heart broke. Our families are dysfunctional because we are all human. But as we deal honestly and openly with one another, we become more and more functional and we can avoid such family heartbreak. Amen.