

2 Samuel 12:1-19:4

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Preacher: Paul Levy

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[2 : 55] Let's do Samuel 13. Let's do Samuel 13. Let's do Samuel 13. Let's do Samuel 13. Let's do Samuel 13. you did last, well, a few weeks ago, about the evil, evil rape of Tamar by my son Amnon. And I was furious about that. I was raging about that. And yet I did absolutely nothing about it. Absolutely nothing. That was the kind of father I was at the time, failing to step in, failing to act. And so

Tamar goes to live with Absalom, my other son. And every morning, Absalom looks across the table at Tamar, and he sees the darkness of her weeping face. He sees how her future has been ruined by that violent act against her. And Absalom is furious. Absalom is raging. And Absalom wonders why his father could not have stepped in and acted upon what had been done. In all the years of growing up, Absalom had heard stories from lots of people about my heroism and about my courage, about Goliath.

I don't think it's overstating the case to say that I was Absalom's hero. And on this one occasion, when Absalom wanted to see my courage and my heroism acted upon, it was nowhere to be seen. And just as he'd seen me succeed, he now saw me fail. And Absalom was furious that I had failed to exact justice as I should. So he waited for two years for me to do something. Two years passed, and nothing had happened. And so after two years, Absalom decides, I'm going to take things into my own hands. He comes to me one day, and he says, I'm going to have a sheep shearing festival, and I'd like you to come. Bring all your servants and all your sons. And I said, I don't know, Absalom, I don't know. I honestly don't want to go to all the bother, all the expense.

I think I'll decline. He keeps pressing me and pressing me, and I finally said, no, I don't think I'm going to come. And so he says to me, well, if you can't come, maybe Amnon can come in your place. I was somewhat suspicious about this. Why does Amnon have to come? Why are you singling him out? And he wouldn't really tell me. He just said, please, please let Amnon come. So eventually I said, okay. He's come. What bad could come of that? I mean, all the other sons were going to be there as well. It was just another example of me being passive, not pushing through, not working out what was really going on. And I realized that just as Amnon had used me as a go-between to lure Tamar into his bedroom. Now, lo and behold, Absalom is using me to lure Amnon to his death. And so the day of the sheep shearing festival comes. Everyone's invited. I'm not there, obviously. But I hear everyone is having a great time. Absalom is biding his time, waiting for Amnon to loosen up sufficiently during happy hour. And sure enough, Amnon eventually, he's drunk enough so Absalom can do the dirty deed. The deed that he thinks that I should have done. And he has Amnon murdered. My son, my son Amnon, dead. Do not give in to the temptation to sin because it is never worth it. Never worth it. I was devastated by the news when I got it.

Amnon was dead. But you know, it was still passive devastation. Because I didn't do anything about it. So Absalom is not going to take the risk of being found out and confronted for what he did. So he gets out of town and he escapes. He goes into exile for three years. He leaves. It wasn't like I didn't know where he was. I knew where he was. He'd gone to Gashur. But in those three years, I never went to see him.

[7 : 25] I never sent word to him. I never acted upon the knowledge that I had. It's not that I didn't think about him. I thought about him all the time, but I never did anything about it. Nothing about it.

And there's one person in my entourage, Joab. He's a commander in my army who says, I need to do something about it. That's not because he was desperate for family harmony. He's just concerned about potential political fallout. The father and the king. The father king and the son not talking to each other. The son being in exile. The possibility of an uprising against the king. So Joab thinks he needs to facilitate some reconciliation here. But it doesn't quite work out in the way that he thought he would. He ends up getting this woman from Tekoa to kind of role play for me.

She comes to me playing the role of a bereaved woman. And she's talking to me. She's telling me this story about her two sons. And one of the sons murdering the other. I immediately think, oh, it's Cain and Abel. And I'm a little dumb to realize that there's something more going on. And there could be a comparison with my family. But there's a Nathan moment when Nathan had said to me, you are the man. And suddenly when this woman's talking, I realize, actually, I have something to do with this story. And so sure enough, when I say to her that I do think that there should be mercy shown to the murderous son, she says, well then, why will you not show mercy to your son? And right there, I saw it. I knew Joab had been up to something. I call Joab in and I say, right, you win. You win. He can come back.

He can come back to Jerusalem, but he's not living here. He's not living out of my roof. And he can come back, but I don't want to see him. I don't have anything to do with Absalom.

And so he comes back. And that's the arrangement for the next two years. Absalom back in Jerusalem, but out of my sight. And I want you to listen really carefully to what I'm about to tell you, because I think some of us might be able to relate to this. And it's this, it's shocking, that my complete refusal to have anything to do with Absalom during this time was the most inexcusable sin in my entire life. It certainly cost me. And you might say, David, that's ridiculous.

[9 : 53] You committed adultery. You were behind a murder, and you are saying that this is the worst. And I'm saying, yes, this is the worst, because those other sins, the Bathsheba sin was a moment of irresponsible passion. And the murder of Uriah was a royal, if I can put it like a royal reflex to avoid detection. But with Absalom, my refusal to have anything to do with him, one of your commentators said, you're absolutely right. He said here, this sin, here is sin with a blueprint.

Because to invite Absalom back and have nothing to do with him, this took commitment, and it took strategy, and it took planning. It took sinning with a high hand. Because Jerusalem at this stage, it's not a big city. It took vigilance for me to avoid seeing Absalom, or being seen by Absalom.

And yet, that is what I was willing to do. And you know, if somebody had come to me, and said to me, I could have explained it, and I could have given all the rationale why I thought this sort of restraining order was needed. My son Absalom, he needed to understand the seriousness of what he'd done.

He'd committed murder. He needed to take responsibility for that. And the pain that he had caused. And that's not necessarily wrong. But my son also needed to know that he was loved by his father. And that there could be acceptance from his father. And that there was the potential to know grace and mercy, so he could just breathe and live. He needed his father. He needed the love of his father, and I wasn't willing to give it to him.

[11 : 45] He needed the love of his father, and I wasn't willing to give it to him. And so I say that because I pray that my failure as a father might be a lesson to you, those of us who are fathers.

That whatever it is that your son or your daughter has done, in order for them to be restored, and find health, and well-being, and restoration, they need their fathers. They need their fathers.

At this point, the fallout from my sin, and the consequences of my sin, extends to the disintegration of my family.

And from the disintegration of my family, it goes to the unraveling of a nation, because at this point, things begin to fall apart. Absalom, at this point, after two years, is a ticking time bomb, and it's not so much a question of if he would explode, but when he'll explode.

He's still furious at the cold shoulder that I've been giving to him, so he decides he's going to do something to get Dad's attention. He gets the torches, he goes to the field of Joab, my right-hand man, and he lights the field, and the fields are ablaze, and it's certainly got Joab's attention.

[12 : 59] Joab has had it up to here right now. And he comes to me and says, this is enough, this has got to stop. You've got to bring him in somehow, and I say, well, okay, okay, okay.

So they bring Absalom to the palace. I issue a kind of formal kiss of restoration, but there's no restoration between us. And Absalom's reaction to this change of circumstances was in no uncertain terms to basically say, next time you can kiss this.

Because the next stage of the explosion, he decides he's going to turn the tables on me. By giving me a dose of my own medicine. If you are going to exclude me, he says, if you want to keep your distance from me, Dad, well, I can do that too.

I can exclude you not just from my presence. In fact, I will exclude you from the kingdom. And at that point, Absalom begins to work towards an armed insurrection against me, against the king. You've got to hand it to him. His cunning, his creativity, his planning are second to none. And the first thing he does is he gathers around him all the trappings of royalty. He's got his chariots and his horses.

[14:10] And he figures out if you want to be treated like a king, you've got to look like a king. And you've got to act like a king. And the next thing he does is he comes every morning and he camps out bright and early outside the palace.

Right at the palace gate. So he can kind of ingratiate himself with the people. So he can present himself, I am the man of the people, not like my dad. I'm the champion.

You're the people's champion. I want to be the man who takes care of everyone else's needs.

Unlike the one in the palace, unlike me. And so slowly but surely, Absalom is stealing the hearts of the people through lies and innuendo.

And this continues for several years, several years, I kid you not. And then Absalom comes to see me and tells me that he wants to go and fulfill a vow that he made long ago at Hebron.

Hebron just happens to be the place where I had been declared king. And in my blind naivety, I say, well off you go then. I send you with my blessing. And so he goes and lo and behold, the next thing I hear is that there's news of an armed insurrection arising against me.

[15:26] And Absalom has declared himself king. And he's about to storm the capital and he's planning the murder of his father. And I realize at that point, this is serious. And I realize if I'm going to protect the lives of my servants, my family, my entourage, I've got to get out of the city.

I need to escape. I need to flee. But I have to tell you this. And I realize actually for the first time in a very long time, I started to act like a king again. Because I started to think not just about myself, but about the well-being of what was going on.

I realized that if I stayed there, the confrontation between Absalom and myself, it wasn't going to be good for him. It wouldn't be good for me. And I also realized that for the city of God's sake, Jerusalem's sake, I needed to let Absalom take the city peacefully.

So that the city would not be under siege. So it was this situation of being forced out of the city, being forced back into the wilderness where I'd spent a lot of time previously, which put me back in touch with the old David.

Which suddenly enabled me to think like a king, where I would do whatever it takes to save the city of God. So Absalom starts moving into Jerusalem from Hebron.

[16:42] And I start that painful journey east with everyone who's still with me. And we move out to the gates, out of the city, and then further east to the last house beyond the gates.

And we stop there at that house, and all my entourage passes me by. Including the Charithites and the Palathites and the Hittites, who've been with me since death in Philistine.

In other words, while my own son and many within Israel are rising up against me in rebellion against me, here was God's reminder that he was still at work.

He was gathering a people to himself. He was preparing a people who are part of God's family promise to Abraham. And that promise that God's people will be part of every nation.

These converted Philistines indicated that God was still at work. He was still faithful to me. I mean, even Ittai, the Hittite, comes to me.

[17:47] He said, Ittai, you don't need to come with me. I understand you're faithful to me, but Ittai, you should stay in the city. And Ittai does his best impression of my grandmother Ruth.

And he says, where you go, David, I go. And I say, okay, okay, thank you. And so he brings his entourage. And all these little kids are toddling behind them as they head off.

He crossed the Kidron Valley, up to the Mount of Olives, down to the Jordan River, across the Mannheim. And every stage of the journey, we're just weeping, weeping, weeping.

Weeping at what had come out of all this. Because do not give in to the temptation of sin, because it is never, never worth it.

I've actually moved into the city, but all through this time, I want you to understand that as God is confronting me with my sin, he's still extending the taste of his grace to me. In a way that I didn't

deserve.

[18:46] As we were fleeing, this guy Shemai comes to us, and he starts flinging rocks at me. Piling rocks at me. Throwing curses at me.

You dirty old man. You murderer. You killer. Get out of town. So if that's the grace of God, I'd like to see what the grace of God is. You see, one of my commanders, one of my nephews, was ready to take care of this guy Shemai.

I, right there and then, but I restrained him because Shemai was right. Shemai was telling the truth, wasn't he? I heard Shemai's word to me as the words of God. Because my identity at that point was not as a king, but as a sinner saved by God's grace, and I'd been forgiven.

So Shemai was just telling it as it is. And then comes the devastating news that came about Ahithophel. Ahithophel was my right-hand man.

He was my best advisor. You know, if you had Ahithophel, it was like having that guy who plays up front for Man City. Haaland, isn't it?

[19:57] Up front. You never knew King David was a Man City fan. But Ahithophel was, he was like the greatest. He was like the wisest.

He was the consummate advisor. He was so wise. He was so sharp. Anytime I was in a quandary, I'd go to Ahithophel. And lo and behold, he would lay it out, and he would make it clear again.

And then I got the word that Ahithophel had jumped ship. That Ahithophel, my great wise advisor, had betrayed me. I write about it in Psalm 55.

The betrayal of a friend, that was Ahithophel. And it turns out that Ahithophel, behind that sage and sharp reputation, actually was just an opportunist. Someone who, despite appearances, was really just looking out for himself.

And yet, at that very moment, when I got the news about Ahithophel, I ironically started to pray. I say ironically because my hunch was that during this time, as I depended and relied on Ahithophel for his advice and his counsel, I'd actually been distancing myself from God a little bit.

[21:10] I failed to come to God and to seek him. Why? Because, well, I've got the great Ahithophel. And I say that to you because some of you will be able to relate to that. You live your Christian life by proxy.

Through someone else, you depend on what someone else says. And you don't go to God yourself, as I should have been doing, seeking out Ahithophel.

I was consulting with Ahithophel. It was far easier for me to do that than to pray. And it was a huge mistake. But at that moment, when I got news, I prayed.

I prayed, oh Lord, may the counsel of Ahithophel turn to foolishness. And God would answer that prayer very clearly later on. But even at this early stage, I see an answer to that prayer in a way that I hadn't expected.

I hadn't expected so quickly because just at that moment, I look up at the crest of the mountain. And I see the answer to my prayer coming on two feet with torn clothes and dirty hair.

[22:11] In fact, I could smell the answer before it arrived. Namely, Hishai. And Hishai comes up to me. And I have a conversation with him. And I say, Hishai, I don't actually need you to come with me.

Not because he stinks. But because I needed him to go back to Jerusalem. To be part of my spy network. Because I had this espionage spy network to find out exactly what was going on with Absalom.

So I needed Hishai to be part of that. And so wonderfully, he said, I'll go. And so can you see, even in the midst of all these consequences of my sin coming into my life, God is extending grace to me. And that's why even before I hear the news of Ahithophel, Zadok comes. And he's bringing the Ark of the Covenant with him. And he says, should we bring the Ark with us? And I said to him, no. I want you to take the Ark back to Jerusalem. Partly because I need Zadok as one of the spies there too. But partly because I understood at this point that my survival, my safety, my well-being, my continuing as king was not going to be dependent on the furniture of the Lord.

[23:17] But it was going to be dependent on the favor of the Lord. And that's what I needed. It was all by his grace. It was all that any of us ever need. And so all dependent on God were off in exile.

And Absalom has moved into Jerusalem with Ahithophel as his right-hand man, taking care of business. And in their minds, they've got to come up with a strategy to get rid of me.

And Ahithophel's recommendation to Absalom is twofold. The first step, he says this. Okay, Absalom, you are going to go and sleep with each of David's concubines that are still in Jerusalem. It's the most brazen declaration to anyone who would watch that Absalom was breaking with the past. He's got no interest in me anymore. No interest in reconciliation whatsoever with his dad. And so here, this son of mine, the man who was so up in arms about the sexual violence committed by Amnon to Tamer, now has got no problem at all, apparently, with a sexual crime perpetuated against his father.

[24 : 24] And so they set up a tent. They set up a tent on the roof of the palace. The exact place where I did that fatal gaze of Bathsheba.

And they bring the concubines one by one. To Absalom in the tent for him to have sex with. It's the most brutal and obvious fulfillment of what the prophet Nathan had told me. Which was that God was going to give my wives over to my neighbor. I just hadn't fathomed that my neighbor would be my son. And so do not give in to the temptation to sin because it never pays off. And as Absalom is planning this, the other part of the strategy that Hithophel wants to present is military. It's how we're going to exterminate David. And at this stage, smelly Hushai arrives. He's kind of eased his way into Absalom's inner circle. And I think Absalom is a little suspicious of him at first. But Hushai manages to convince him. I'm on your side. I'm not on David's side.

[25 : 27] And so now he's got Hithophel, the great wise sage, and Hushai. And he asks them both, what should I do? What should be the strategy? Hithophel says, here's what I think you should do.

Just focus on David. Go after David. Get David. Get rid of him. Kill David alone. Hushai says, I think Hithophel is wrong here. He says, I think we need to wipe out the entire army.

I think that's going to be the only way to prevent civil war here. And Hushai's strategy was brilliant. Because in one false group, he not only appealed to Absalom's insecurity, but also his vanity. He would be the commander of an army that defeated David's army. It sowed seeds of doubt about Hithophel's wisdom, his advice. And importantly for me, it brought me time.

So I was able to cross back over the Jordan, get resources from our allies, and prepare the army. I'm no young man at this time. This is towards the end of the age, end of my reign.

[26 : 31] But I feel re-energized. I was ready to lead my army, albeit against my son. But my men say, no, David, you need to stay here. You need to stay in Manaheim.

You need to stay safe. So I reluctantly agree. If I stand on a platform, and I watch them heading off, but I said, here's one last command for you.

Please, please, please, deal gently with Absalom. And you're thinking, are you nuts? Have you forgotten what you've just told us over the last, what feels like, three hours?

And I'm like, no, I know what Absalom has done. And I know that he's been working against me, unbeknownst for years. And I know that he's actually tried to kill me.

And I know that he's been pursuing me like Saul had pursued me all those years ago. But he's still my son. And I was still his father, and I failed him as a dad. And the weight of that bore down on me.

[27 : 29] So I watched my army go off to war against the army of my son. And all that is left for me to do is wait. When I sit between the two gates waiting, it was not lost on me.

But the last time that I'd been waiting for news from a battle was when I waited for the death of a good man, Uriah. But now I was waiting with dread for the same news of my son, Absalom.

And days went by and no news. And so I have my watchman on the roof of the gate watching to see, is there anyone coming with news? And eventually the day comes when they say, there is someone coming.

There is someone running towards us. He's on his own. And I thought, finally, finally some news. And then they said, well, there's actually someone a little bit behind him as well. And I thought, maybe he's got an update.

And the first runner, he's running in the way that Ahimehez runs. He's got a very distinctive running style. Ahimehez. He's the son of Zadok. And I thought, well, he's a good man. He's going to have good news.

[28 : 34] It's basically desperately clutching at straws of an anxious father. And Ahimehez arrives and says, all is well. Shalom. Peace. The Lord be blessed because he's given victory to you over your enemies.

And I say to him, that isn't actually what I want to know. I want to know about my son Absalom. Is there shalom with Absalom? Is he well?

And Ahimehez has got no answer to that. He steps aside. The next runner arrives. He happens to be a Kushite. And he comes and he gives the same news. The Lord has delivered you from your enemies, from the army.

And again, I say, well, what about my son? Is there shalom with Absalom? And he said, may the enemy of the king be like that man.

Come again. May the enemies of the king be like that man. He's dead. He's dead. I wasn't in a position or a place at that point to hear any of the details of what had happened.

[29 : 44] But later on, I find out that Absalom is riding on a horse in the forest. And he's going through thick branches of an oak tree. And he gets caught. His head gets caught in the branches. The mule kind of carries on.

And so Absalom is left hanging there. He's still alive. And one of my soldiers sees him. And he goes to Joab. And he tells Joab about it. And Joab is livid. He's furious that he'd not finished Absalom.

And the soldier says, well, I was there. I was there when the king said. Do you remember? The king said, be gentle with my boy Absalom. And apparently, Joab didn't think it was important to abide by the rules because for him, it was politically expedient to get rid of Absalom.

And so, with his sticks, he starts off the job. And then he brings in some more from there to finish him off. To kill my son. I was in no place to hear those details as I heard the news out of the mouth of this cushy.

I was numb. You would have been too devastated, crushed. I needed to be alone. So, I climb up to my room, up the steps, above the gate.

[30 : 54] And then as I climb in, I can't hold it in anymore. Oh, Absalom, my son, my son, my son Absalom. Would that I had died in my place instead of you. Oh, Absalom, my son, my son.

And Joab gets wind that the king is crying inconsolably in his room. And so, he comes in. Joab is not, is he, the most sympathetic character on the face of the earth. And he starts reading me the riot act.

He's like, you're acting like you've lost this battle. You've got all those soldiers out there. And as far as we can tell, you couldn't care less about them. Your tears are just pouring scorn and shame upon these soldiers.

They've risked their lives for you. They've done everything necessary to save your skin and save your kingdom. So, get out there and thank them for their service and their sacrifice. Because if you don't, David, you're not only going to lose this army, you're going to lose the people.

He was right, of course. But he was my son. And you see the cost of a king's paternal role and his political role. But I did what he said.

[31 : 58] I shuffled out to beneath the gate. I sat down with all the people before the king. Their victorious king. Their magnificent, victorious king, who on the inside is just a broken, broken man.

And so, do not give in to the temptation of sin because it's never, never worth it. 3,000 years on from those events and 2,000 years ago, we come to another event from the coming of the greater David, the great son of David, Jesus the Messiah.

And in his coming, he told a story, didn't he, about another son and another father. And you know the parable.

Because here was the story of a father who is totally unlike me, because this father has a rebellious son. And this son comes to the father and says, I want nothing to do with you anymore.

I'm leaving. I wish that you were dead. Give me what is mine. And he leaves. From that day on, the father stood on the porch and looked as far as his eyes can see.

[33 : 12] And he waited for the day when a speck would appear on the horizon. And that speck would get closer and closer and closer and it would be his son.

And that day came. And for that father, there was no passivity. There was no restraining order. There was no keeping a distance against this rebellious son.

The father picks up his robes and throws the quorum to the wind and he runs to his son. He runs and he runs and he wraps his arms around his son and he says, we are going to have the party to end all parties.

Because you are my son. You, my son, have come home. It's exact opposite of David, the father. And yet it is, isn't it?

A beautiful picture of my heavenly father and I trust your heavenly father. Because it's a picture of a father who has shown grace to all his rebellious children. And I had seen glimpses of that grace

even in the midst of all the consequences of my sin.

[34 : 18] And it is a grace that he longs to pour out to any of us. You know, all of you have made big mistakes in your life. Maybe not as big as mine.

But whatever your mistakes, this God wants to show you grace in your life and to give you forgiveness. For whatever it is and to lift you out of any kind of shame and guilt for your past and to give you a new start and to give you a new beginning.

But that doesn't cancel the consequence of our sin. So let me leave you with this question. Why pile up further consequences by further intentional sin?

Why do that? Especially here is a heavenly father who loves you, who cares for you, who wants the absolute best for you.

Do not give in the temptation of sin. Neither sins of commission or sins of commission.

[35 : 34] Because it is never, never worth it. Let's pray.