

Redemptive Failure | Fall and Rise of the House of David

A Proud Father (and a Failed Homecoming)

Second Samuel 14 (12-14, 23ff)

9.4.22

¹² Then the woman said, "Please let your maidservant speak a word to my lord the king." And he said, "Speak." ¹³ The woman said, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in speaking this word the king is as one who is guilty, in that the king does not bring back his banished one." ¹⁴ "For we will surely die and are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away life, but plans ways so that the banished one will not be cast out from him.

²³ So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. ²⁴ However the king said, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face." So Absalom turned to his own house and did not see the king's face.

²⁵ Now in all Israel was no one as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no defect in him. ²⁶ When he cut the hair of his head (and it was at the end of every year that he cut it, for it was heavy on him so he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head at 200 shekels by the king's weight. ²⁷ To Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was **Tamar**; she was a woman of beautiful appearance.

²⁸ Now Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, and did not see the king's face. ²⁹ Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but he would not come to him. So he sent again a second time, but he would not come. ³⁰ Therefore he said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. ³¹ Then Joab arose, came to Absalom at his house and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" ³² Absalom answered Joab, "Behold, I sent for you, saying, 'Come here, that I may send you to the king, to say, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me still to be there.'" Now therefore, let me see the king's face, and if there is iniquity in me, let him put me to death." ³³ So when Joab came to the king and told him, he called for Absalom. Thus he came to the king and prostrated himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom. (2 Sam. 14)

We're looking at a period of time in ancient Israel (about 1000 BC). It's the "fourth quarter" in the life of King David and it's marked by the consequences of his failings as a king and as a father. I encourage you to get the last two sermons online if you want to catch up.

David's firstborn son, Amnon, physically and sexually assaulted his half-sister, Tamar. It was cruel, perverse and cold-blooded. King David heard about it and got really angry but took no action. Then,

Princess Tamar's full-brother, Absalom, "two full years" (see 13.23, 14.28) after this crime has gone unaddressed, by King David, Absalom took the law into his own hands and had Amnon killed to avenge the animalistic crime against his sister, Tamar.

Now, Absalom, the vigilante, is in exile in Syria (with his maternal grandparents) and three years later, he comes home to Jerusalem... but the homecoming sort of fizzles.

So, today, we look into this deeply troubled family and see in them some of the dynamics that continue to plague broken families (and ALL families are somewhat broken). Modern families, here in South Florida, still face issues of parent-child hostility, poor communication, sexual sin, distance, tension, coldness in relationships and lack of forgiveness, warmth and affection. These stories are relevant!

What, are the resources found in the basic idea behind Christianity – what do we find in the Gospel that we can draw upon to help us – to save us – from these issues that are so destructive? Is the message of Jesus and His great achievement... is there help in it for US and for people struggling with family brokenness?

Let's look at:

- 1. A Homecoming Contrived**
- 2. A Homecoming Complete**
- 3. A Homecoming Current (Complex, Complicated)**

This episode is characterized by manipulations. And what we omitted today (vv. 1-11, 15-22) is a ploy that David's nephew, general and advisor, Joab (we'll see a lot of him in this section); Joab schemes with a psychologist to help David DO what David wants to do and should do.

Joab puts a story in her mouth. He has her disguise herself as a widow in mourning. Her contrived story is that her grown sons were working in a field, got into a bad argument and then a scuffle in which one killed the other. And NOW the men of her village want the death penalty for the killer... which IS justice... but it will NOT be good for her – she'll have lost two sons and she'll have no one to protect her in her old age.

Joab's story is based on the case of Cain and Abel who (Genesis CH 4) were in a field when Cain killed his brother, Abel... And God did NOT give the murderer what he deserved. He cursed Cain but also protected him with some sort of sign ("Don't kill this man!") and the woman in telling this parable to the king is basically saying, "Please protect my remaining son the way God protected the first murderer. And David replies, "Leave it to me."

But she wants a bit more proactive solution from the king and finally a third time she gets to the bottom line: "Uh... um... can we talk? I mean in agreeing with me about MY two sons and vowing to protect the killer, you do realize that you're condemning yourself...right?!"

And David realizes, “Ugh! These parables will be the death of me!” (Remember, Nathan used a parable to make David angry ...and angry at his own sin! AND now it’s happening again! [Fool me once...fool me twice])

Then the woman gives the bottom line: 1) we’re all dying (like water spilled on the ground) and that’s irreversible – so let’s act while we have time and 2) v.14 God doesn’t take away life – He plans ways for banished ones can come HOME.

And David, realized that Joab (basically a good guy and very loyal to David) Joab was behind this and Joab meant it for everyone’s good... So, Joab is sent to Syria (Geshur) and brings the “banished one” home... What a day of rejoicing that will be! But no reception awaits him.

AND Absalom is lookin’ good! He’s super handsome! And he has that HAIR (a little foreshadowing here!). He inherited his father’s good looks and has passed on the beauty to his daughter, Tamar (also a real beauty!).

BUT we seem to get another foreshadowing in the way David speaks of his fugitive son. V.21 “Joab, go and get the LAD, Absalom.” (Heb word “na’ar” as in 13.17) Is there a little insult there? He’s an adult...but called, “Boy.”

Our fears are confirmed when, for whatever reason, the king would not see the banished son. And it goes on for two full years. They live in the same small city but manage to totally avoid one another. “Why is Dad ignoring me? Am I IN or OUT? I’m home but not home.”

And he’s waiting to be embraced by Dad, or acknowledged... or punished...or anything, but NOT ignored! And he pulls a manipulative stunt (it shows how being ignored is maddening!): “Joab won’t get me a meeting with Dad; even Joab ignores me!” So Absalom goes all Samson (Judg 15): long hair and likes to set fields on fire...wants attention because even bad attention is better than being ignored! Being ignored is the worst!

And finally the third bowing scene: the wise woman (psychologist) bows to David; Joab bowed to David and now, the one we’ve been waiting for, Absalom... and Absalom bows... bows before his dad and his dad kissed his son. Except that’s not what it says; it reads, “He bowed before the king and the king kissed Absalom.”

It was a contrived, official, state-sponsored, appropriate act of pardon from the king... but it was NOT the warm, affectionate, joyful embrace of a father who was getting his son back from the dead. And the next chapter makes clear that Absalom FELT the cold and his disappointment begins to change to rivalry.

King David had trouble in the “Dad-Department”; he was more comfortable in his professional role... It’s an old story... repeated ad nauseum over the centuries.

Too bad David wasn’t around to hear the story of another two sons. Jesus Christ told a story of a son who took his father’s inheritance BEFORE the father even died and went into self-imposed exile in the land of FUN (Luke 15).

And when that son finally returned home, penniless and pitiful, his father saw him coming from a long distance: “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.” (v.20)

For an older man to run was an inappropriate way for to behave in that culture but the father in Christ’s story wasn’t so concerned with being appropriate and kingly as David was; he simply couldn’t help but run because he was so happy to have his son back from the dead.

This father couldn’t ignore his son even while the son was in the far country. He was daily watching, ever attentive; “he saw him, felt compassion for him, ran and embraced him, and kissed him.”

Then, as you know, he threw a huge party but the older son, “the good son”, the dutiful, hard-working son who “slaved” for the father would not enter the party but stayed outside sulking. And yet the father loved him too and went to him (humbled himself by running and again by pleading with the older son [παρακαλέω]).

David was a proud father; Jesus Christ introduced us to the Humble Father. David was more like the older brother in Jesus Christ’s parable... And David had a long, long time to think about it (three years in exile and two more while Absalom was in Jerusalem)... but when the moment came...David could NOT take off the crown and put on the baseball cap. He did king – not Dad.

In the sending of Jesus Christ, the Older Brother who does go into the far country to find his lost brothers and sisters and BE the Way for the banished ones to come home... and in sending Jesus Christ, God was humbling Himself. The prophet Isaiah prayed, “*Oh, that You (O God) would burst from the heavens and come down! How the mountains would quake in your presence!*” (Isa. 64.1)

And when God in Christ came down, and humbled Himself all the way... throned upon that awful tree... didn’t the mountains quake (Matt 27.51)? This was a complete homecoming – and it was a brutal, messy but necessary Way for banished sinners to come home.

This was NOT a neat and appropriate, contrived and artificial welcome... it’s like the father running and pleading with his lost son to come home and come inside where the party is. Through Hosea God says, “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? ...My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled.” (11.8)

I wonder if you feel that. I wonder if WE feel what Piper called the infinite emotional complexity of God; that God is infinitely holy and hates sin because it's a lie and it brings death. AND God has no joy in the death of the wicked. He's not interested in taking away life but plans ways so that the banished ones can come home?

Do you often feel guilty? Do you feel guilty for NOT feeling guilty enough? Is that something you wrestle with?

My last point is a homecoming Current and also Complex, Complicated. If you will live NOT just a religious or proper or good life but a life energized by God's Spirit living and moving IN you – it will be characterized by a sense of welcome and of God's JOY in having you HOME.

Somehow, you'll have this sense that though I am NOT a good person – I break God's good laws more often than I think... Adam was banished after committing ONE sin – THAT'S how holy God is. Justice says I deserve to be banished but God's great mercy for me in Christ says, "I can't let you go! I have to have you, to love and cherish you and celebrate your return, your homecoming, for all eternity." (Luke 15.10)

And when you have a real sense of that on your heart, it leads to generosity, patience with others and a real desire to see the banished ones come home INTO the house of acceptance and joy and love and purpose as God's restored sons and daughters!

Look – one reason people hide in their work is because relationships in the home can be so difficult. People who make big bucks and have power and admiration from their peers... feel like "90-pound weaklings" when it comes to relating to their kids. They (we) find it much easier to wear the heavy, heavy crown than to wear the baseball cap. They (we) ignore the kids because... well ...what are we gonna talk about? David was that kind of man – easier to mobilize armies than to converse with his son.

Twice in the NT, this verse is sort of repeated. In Ephesians Paul writes, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (6.4) BUT the second time, Paul leaves off the discipline and instruction part and he simply writes, "*Fathers, do not exasperate your children that they not lose heart.*" (Col 3.21)

From that we have to conclude that the shorter verse is the real problem... we tend to provoke our children to anger and to exasperate them. It happens when we don't discipline and instruct them and in lots of other ways like hypocrisy and pride (refusing to repent in front of them and to admit our wrongs) BUT maybe THE most common way to engender bitterness in our kids and others – is to ignore them. Don't listen, don't look.

But when God's Spirit – whether in worship or prayer or in suffering or if conversation with other Christians – when the Spirit opens our eyes to who we are – the banished ones, deserving of justice

and death, but instead KISSED by God, accepted, cherished, included, NOT IGNORED but acknowledged – THEN we find our own compassion kindled, our proud hearts humbled and we take off that heavy crown, humble ourselves and give those around us what they really need and want – our attention, our eyes and ears.

Believing the Gospel is the way to love.