

Title: Vengeance or Convenient Justice
Text: 2 Samuel 13.23-39
Theme: When I don't get what I want
Series: 2 Samuel
Prop Stmt: How you respond when you don't get what you want reveals what you really think you deserve.

Transitions of power bring uncertainty at the least and often invite insurrection. Because people are so desperate to avoid the dangers and chaos that comes with transitions, nations will go to great lengths to ensure peaceable processes. Watch how kings are enthroned or watch how presidents are set into office. If you have served in the military, you know how much of your time is spent attending and participating in ceremonies that mark a change of rank, a change in power or a transition of authority. All of the oaths and formality are designed to make one thing very clear: This is the person in charge. This the voice of authority. Protocol is essential. Titles are required. My lord the king. Your majesty. Long live the king! But those tools designed to promote and protect the country's final authority also breed a lust on the part of some for that very position. What would it be like if I were the king? What would it be like to have people stand when I enter the room, servants who would dress me in exquisite attire, attendants who would vie for my approval, world leaders who would want an audience? Almost every person has had those thoughts. Some are controlled by them.

Power is such a messy business. It is one of the great curses from Genesis 3. We think we want power to wield for our pleasure, only to discover that like Gollum's ring, it has us and is wielding us and as much as we hate what it does to us, we would die before we give it up.

Teams work so long and so hard win the championship. But, before all the champagne has popped and the confetti has fallen, some reporter is asking the coach about next year. The day after a president is elected the incessantly talking heads are speculating on who will run and win four years from then. Transition. Power. What is going to happen next? It is on everyone's mind, especially that of a business owner, but particularly that of a king. Who will succeed me? Who will protect or even build on what I have accomplished? Who will carry on the vision, the legacy, the success? The leader looks at the needs of the kingdom, while those vying for the position often look with envy upon the perks and privileges that seem to come with power.

Last weekend, many of us watched with amazement as a military leader in Russia marched toward Moscow in order to bring about regime change. The United States has 7,428 nuclear warheads. We have the 2nd largest stockpile. Russia has 23,890 nuclear warheads (that we know about) which is more than 3x the amount we do. So, yes, it is a really big deal. People, like Putin work their entire lives in order to get into power, then they live in terror of those who want to take it from them. But then comes the relentless drumbeat of time and reality as leaders are forced to think, who is going to get it after me. That transition is such a scary proposition because so many people would kill for it and destroy the nation over it, that many nations have simply opted for one family to be the royal family so that the question of succession is settled at least to some point. But it still isn't settled. Who, in the family is going to be king? That "divine

right” often falls upon the firstborn son. Which seems reasonable to most firstborn sons, but it can be deadly to an envious second-born or intensely competitive third-born who is not amazed that he was born into the royal family, but is consumed with figuring out how he can be first. David has built a powerful kingdom. The early part of his reign was marked by war and expansion. Now, the benefits of his victories and the goods, services and taxes levied on his defeated enemies supplies weapons, defenses and salaries for his troops. The peace secured enables his people to live prosperously. Their crops and herds are not taken by others but are their own to keep and use as currency. The nation has risen out of servitude and poverty and in less than one generation is building villages into towns, huts into houses and Jerusalem into a capital worthy of visiting. The one who inherits this throne would be getting a sweet prize. David knows this. David also knows that God promised him a son (2 Samuel 7) who would sit on his throne, unlike Saul. Succession is on the mind of God; it would be on David’s mind as well. Amnon was the presumed choice. But then we witnessed what poison power can be as Amnon leverages his entitled position to steal and destroy the purity of his half-sister, Tamar.

Absalom’s response to the raping of his sister seems a bit odd. *“Now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this to heart.”* But there is perhaps dynamics at play that we are not aware of. Was he waiting on his father to address this? Was there favoritism toward Amnon that protected the firstborn from consequences others would face? Does Absalom listen day after day to the desolate cries of his sister and determines to revenge her honor and make Amnon pay for her shame? Maybe. But, the more we learn about Absalom, the more we see that he is just like Amnon. Amnon’s grievous sin, gives Absalom a plausible reason for removing the one obstacle that stands between him and the throne. So, at the end of our text last week, Absalom says neither good nor bad to Amnon. But now, two years has gone by and Absalom speaks.

Read Text:

Amnon, like his father commits a devastating sexual sin. Absalom, like his father, commits murder. David, who used others in chapter 11 to carry out and attempt to cover his sin, is now being used, first by Amnon and now by Absalom. Unlike Amnon, we have some sense of empathy for Absalom. Amnon raped Absalom’s sister which meant she not only bore the internal effects of that assault, but she was no longer a virgin daughter of the king. The fact that she could no longer wear the robe that marked her as a royal virgin only added to the public shame of the private horror she lived with. This was Absalom’s sister. He may have heard that David, his father, the king was angry. He may have waited to see if something was going to be done. Whether immediately or at some point down the road, Absalom decided to take matters into his own hands. However, ...

1. **Vengeance does not belong to me.** (23 - 27)

Batman, Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood, Rambo, Bruce Lee, and tons of others have populated movies and comic books with vigilantism. Vengeance has generated hundreds of millions of dollars because vengeance taps a sentiment deep in all of us. One of the consequences of living

in a sin-cursed world is the grievous reality of being sinned against and seeing, at times, evil going unpunished. It may be hard for some to grasp, that God really is a God of vengeance, but on further thought, vengeance is actually rooted in the goodness of God. It is a good thing that God is a God of vengeance for a couple of reasons. 1) He says so.

“Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand and their doom comes swiftly.” Deut. 32.35

“I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me.” Deut. 32.41b

“...He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people’s land.” Deut. 32.43b

“O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up. O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve!” Psalm 94.1-2

“...for the LORD is a God of recompense; he will surely repay.” Jeremiah 51.56b

“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.” Nahum 1.2

The second reason why it is so good that God is a God of vengeance because we would only make matters worse. Paul warns us against taking matters into our own hands when he says,

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Romans 12.19

Why is that? How do you know when your sense of injustice will be satisfied? What can you do to make the wrongs, right? What is particularly difficult is when you are in the middle of it, like Absalom was. How much of this was motivated by Absalom’s sense of justice for the evil done to his sister and how much of this was motivated by Absalom’s opportunism to remove the one obstacle that he perceived that stood between him and inheriting the throne? That’s the problem. We do not know our own hearts. We may convince ourselves that in the moment, we are only pursuing what is good and right, but blind to the fact that we are also pursuing what is convenient. That is why, vengeance is not on our job description. It is not on our plate. It is not our responsibility. God is a God of vengeance and he will do it right. His ways, are perfect.

Absalom lived as if Amnon was dead before he murdered him. He refused to talk to him. We can all relate to this. The people that we either don’t want to talk to, or don’t talk to are the ones we are bitter against, or, do I dare say it? Are the ones that we want to die. We murder them in our hearts by refusing to talk to them as if they are alive. That person is dead to me. I don’t care if I ever speak to them again. When we think that, we are taking on the role of Absalom. We are being the judge, jury and executioner.

But it is so easy, so natural to take matters into our own hands. In Absalom's case, he did not speak to his brother. He said nothing good or bad. Absalom hated Amnon (v.22). Every day that Amnon lived without facing the consequences of his sin, only added fuel to the internal inferno in Absalom's heart. David, where are you? David is in a terrible position, but one of his own making. His son has committed a grievous sin against his daughter and David is charged with being the chief law enforcer. If he enforces the law, he would be bringing upon his son, a sentence that he himself did not face. If he doesn't enforce the law, he is making it appear as if the law is not to be taken seriously. When the person at the top does not follow the law, then why should anyone else do so? David was really trapped. Not knowing what to do, he did nothing. But problems like this do not resolve themselves. Into this vacuum stepped Absalom. If David wouldn't deal with it, he would. If David wouldn't be man enough to address the problems in his own family, Absalom would. It is easier to execute justice against your half-brother than against your son. David failed because he refused to address the problem. This gave Absalom the convenient opportunity, the reason, the excuse (?) the cover to do to Amnon what would pave the road for Absalom to get to the throne. As much as Absalom may have resented his father from failing to act, Absalom learns something about power: get those under your authority to do the dirty work. Absalom did not murder Amnon, his servants did. Did it solve anything? When you take vengeance into your hands, it never does. We are commanded to love our enemies, by praying for them and if they are hungry or thirsty, feeding them or giving them something to drink. We are to forgive those who sin against us when they repent of it, and if they don't, we need to pray for them and be prepared to forgive them. There is nothing supernatural about wishing ill on those who have wronged you or plotting for their demise in the name of justice.

Is there someone you resent? Is there someone that you refuse to talk to or try to avoid? Would you pray for them this week? Would you ask God even right now, to help you have the grace to pray for them. Pray for them to follow Christ. Pray that you can be an influence that helps them do that. Do you see the influence of that? We are called to be the salt of the earth. Salt helps stop decay. Salt is a preservative. Envy, bitterness, and revenge only generate more evil.

2. Sin #1 never justifies sin #2.

The events of vs. 23-27 make it clear that Absalom was hell-bent on vengeance. He just had to play his cards right. The annual sheep shearing was a major event. Like the harvest to farmers, the gathering of wool was a time of celebration because it was a time of reward and bounty. Absalom asks his dad and his entourage to attend his event about 15 miles to the northeast. David politely refused, which Absalom pretended to be disappointed and had anticipated and then asked if Amnon could come. That aroused David's suspicions but Absalom ended up inviting all of the king's sons so his plan would not be so obvious. Finally, permission was given. Away from the protections of the palace, Absalom was able to take matters into his own hands. He instructed his servants to wait until Amnon was drunk (and wouldn't be on guard, and couldn't defend himself) and then be ready to strike him dead. Absalom would give the signal. The servants of Absalom had to have been in shock. They were being ordered to murder the king's son. Absalom told them to be brave, be valiant. God does not call us to be courageous

and valiant to do evil, but not to do evil. It is Absalom's turn to abuse the authority he has and demand loyalty from those under him to join him in his evil.

We are spared the gory details. Amnon is killed. Panic ensues. The other sons of David flee back to the palace. Being the son of a king is often a dangerous thing. Before the sons make it back someone arrives with a rumor that all of the sons of the king were executed. David immediately believes it and without pressing for proof, like he did earlier when he received word of the death of Saul, he immediately tore his clothes and fell to the ground as his did his servants. At this point Jonadab, that slimy nephew of David's and cousin to Amnon and Absalom assures David that all the sons were not killed, only Amnon. Wait!! How did he know that? Apparently this sleazeball was able to worm his way into the confidence of Absalom. He knew about the plan. Makes you wonder if he didn't come up with it or tweak it. But when counselors like this are lurking in the palace, it only points out how some of David's discernment has been compromised. Sure enough, the other sons return. The eldest son and heir to the throne has been killed by his own brother and that brother has fled for his life.

Vengeance did not belong to Absalom; it belonged and belongs to God. Authorities are intended to be the representatives of God and will give an account to God of how they used that authority for justice, or in David's case for not. David had a responsibility to carry out justice because he was installed by God as God's representative of justice. David's failure to pursue justice with Amnon invited Absalom's sin of murder. Absalom is fully responsible for his sin of murder. David's failure to act justly provided a convenient opportunity for Absalom. When evil is not punished by civil authorities, it invites vigilantes, but we are forbidden to take justice into our own hands because God is the ultimate one who will act and hold everyone accountable for their deeds. Even if David did not act, God would. Absalom should have gone to David and if necessary to the elders and trusted counselors in order to plead with David to carry out justice. But, even if David failed at that, Absalom was forbidden to take matters into his own hands.

Amnon had it coming. Yes, but not from Absalom. It is not up to me and you to take matters into our own hands and appoint ourselves as judge, jury and executioner. When we do that, we only have more violence that invites more retaliation. Now violence has ruptured the royal family even more. But this is all we can come up. Our world is full of stories of sin, then revenge, then more revenge, then more revenge and there is no end until everyone is dead. How does the killing of Amnon free Tamar from her shame and desolation? Even the fairest of our court systems and verdicts cannot make all of the wrongs, right. We live in a sin-cursed world. Evil is prevalent and at times appear to have the upper hand. We get to the end of stories like this and we ask...

3. Lord, where are you?

These are hard chapters. The fact is, the vast majority of the OT is difficult to read. One of the values of studying the OT is the weighty reminder of how much we need a Savior and how we absolutely cannot save ourselves! David is one of the good kings. Even though he was doing some good things publicly, privately his life and family was a mess. Who can rescue the mess

that we have made? Of course the answer is Jesus. We still have some difficult parts to get through, but let these accounts, just like the hardships in your life, fuel your longing for Christ and his return. Israel had to wait another 1,000 years for Christ to come. We know that he has. We know that he is returning. We know that came, he lived, he died and he rose again. We know the story now. We have so much more reason for hope because of the life of Christ. If you don't trust Christ, then I don't know how you deal with revenge without despair or being consumed by it. If you know Christ, you know that you are the right side of history and one day, his kingdom will come and his will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven.