

“The Consuming Fire of Vengeance”
2 Samuel 13:22-39
(Preached at Trinity, August 18, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The first half of **Chapter 13** records the unspeakable act of Amnon against his sister. While Absalom’s actions in the following chapters are certainly despicable, the actions of Amnon leaves us thoroughly disgusted.
 - A. At least we find in Absalom a tender care for his sister. Upon hearing of Amnon’s actions he tells his sister, “Do not take this matter to heart.”
The exact meaning is unclear, but they seem to be sympathizing words. He took her into his care. He demonstrated the care and protection men owe to women. Protective care Tamar received from neither Amnon nor her father.
 - B. Sadly, we find no evidence of the healing words of a father towards his wounded daughter. In **Chapter 12** we read of David comforting Bathsheba in the death of their infant child, but no words of comfort here for Tamar. Tamar desperately needed words of healing, words of comfort and restoration that only her father the king could have provided to help her regain the dignity she had lost and overcome the shame. She needed the grace of forgiveness but received nothing. What a difference it might have made. This is the last we hear of Tamar. She was forever affected by this violent and wicked act committed against her.
David never did a thing. We read at the beginning of **Verse 23**:
“Not it came about after two full years . . .” After two years David still had done nothing.
 - C. While David was angry and did nothing, Absalom was also angry. He was furious. His anger seethed within him.
Where Paul warns us “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26) we read in **Verse 23** - “Now it came about after two full years”
 - D. Since David had not brought justice against the wicked act of Amnon, Absalom decided he would.
Absalom counselled Tamar not to harbor this thing in her heart. But Absalom surely harbored it in his heart.
The words of **Verse 22** set the stage for what was to come:
“But Absalom did not speak to Amnon, either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar.”
2. The problem is, Absalom’s anger was sinful. He didn’t want justice. He wanted vengeance. He was patient, cunning, and calculating.
 - A. It would appear that the situation with Tamar had been put away. All was forgotten life was going on. But it was not forgotten in the heart of Absalom!
 - B. Absalom waited for two years before putting his plan into motion. He would invite the king and his servants to celebrate the sheep-shearing, knowing that David would decline. Then he requested Amnon, the crown prince, to come in his stead. All of his brothers attended the feast and after the wine had taken its effect, his servants would fall upon Amnon and put him to death.

3. Absalom's murderous revenge is particularly vile, not only because it involved the murder of his own brother, but it was also a gross violation of eastern hospitality. Those invited into your home had to be provided for and protected. We can see this in the case of Lot's care for his angelic guests. He was willing to sacrifice his own daughters in caring for his guests.
4. David had most likely told his boys stories when he was tempted to act out on feelings of Revenge—revenge he did not take.
 - A. Saul was David's arch enemy who more than once tried to take David's life. But when David had the opportunity to execute his vengeance he refrained. David did not seek his revenge, nor did he allow his soldiers. David denied himself the impulse of vengeance because he knew God would not be pleased. **1 Samuel 24:6 NAU** - "So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed."
 - B. At another time David had been insulted by Nabal, the husband of Abigail. She would have been Absalom's step-mother. David had sent ten of his young soldiers to Nabal to request provisions. David felt perfectly justified in this request since he and his men had provided protection to Nabal's shepherds and his flock. Nabal responded harshly: **1 Samuel 25:10-11 NAU** - "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. ¹¹ "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?"
 1. David's men returned to him and reported Nabal's insults. David's response was not unexpected. He was furious. He had been slandered and insulted. David responded with fury and indignation. In an act of personal vengeance David determined to execute Nabal and every man living within his household. **1 Samuel 25:22 NAU** - "May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave *as much as* one male of any who belong to him."
 2. It was only by the gracious intervention of God that David was held back from this avenging act. Abigail spoke to him: **1 Samuel 25:26 NAU** - "the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand"
 3. The means God used was this wise and prudent woman. What great difference it might have made if Absalom would have recalled these stories. What a difference if he would have heeded the counsel his step-mother gave to his father many years before. **1 Samuel 25:32-33 NAU** - "Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, ³³ and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand."
5. I shared two weeks ago the importance of seeking wise counsellors. It is the foolish son who does not seek counsel, who impulsively devises actions according to his own mind.

6. Absalom's willful act of revenge permanently affected his life and set him on a course of rebellion that ultimately destroyed his life.
I have set this subject before you many times in the past from several different texts in the Bible. As I searched back over my sermon archive this is the fourth time over the past 20 years.
7. It is a subject we need to hear often. The Bible holds it before us often because we are so prone to fall into this sin. Vengeance is in our heart. It rises from the sin of pride and selfishness that so easily besets us.
As we'll see with Absalom, it is a sin that can consume us and destroy our lives.
8. The Bible is not vague regarding this subject. It is a subject where we get clear instruction from the Word of God. Most of us consider ourselves guiltless of this sin because we don't understand the nature of vengeance. May God grant us ears to hear clearly lest we find ourselves guilty of that which God's abhors.
- I. The best place to begin is in defining what vengeance is
- A. Most people are content that they have not committed this sin
1. They see vengeance as bringing great harm upon another as an act of retribution for a personal offense suffered. We think of the vigilante who executes vengeance upon the one who harmed a member of his family.
 2. They picture taking up arms and inflicting great pain
- B. Vengeance can be defined in much simpler terms
1. Vengeance is committed anytime someone seeks to wound another because they feel they have been wronged. But we need to understand all that this entails.
 2. Have you ever lashed out in anger saying words that are meant to wound? This is an act of vengeance.
 3. Have you ever given someone the silent treatment or gone about openly showing that they have offended you. Perhaps speaking to them in a manner that's curt and dismissive. This is vengeance.
 4. Have you ever gossiped about someone who has offended you, even in the privacy of your own home? This is vengeance.
 5. Vengeance can even take place at the level of the mind as bitterness rises and we secretly wish ill toward them, or rejoice when calamity comes upon them.
This is vengeance. Jesus declared such thinking is the seed of murder.
Matthew 5:21-22 NAU - "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' ²² "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court"
You don't have to act on the anger. It's the harboring of the anger that brings you under the power of vengeance. This was Absalom's great sin before he ever struck down his brother.
- Having established vengeance as far more common than we might think what does the Bible teach us about vengeance?

II. First of all, God says vengeance does not belong to you. This means with vengeance you are taking that which belongs to God alone.

Romans 12:19 NAU - "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

- A. There are several presuppositions as we consider the subject of revenge
1. First, there is the presupposition that you have been unjustly wronged
It is the victim that seeks retribution.
 2. Second, the context of revenge has the perpetrator as your enemy—
With vengeance, even our dear loved one might become our enemy—at least in your heart.
 3. Third, there is the presupposition that you feel you deserve retribution.
You have been harmed. He deserves to suffer.
Amnon had committed a terrible act against Absalom's sister. He did not offer restitution. And David, the king, had not executed justice. Absalom felt himself justified in his retribution.
- B. Retribution can take many forms
1. Perhaps they've hurt your pride by spreading some vicious rumor or simply said something that maligned your character. You want to retaliate by returning insult for insult.
1 Peter 3:8-9 NAU - "To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹ not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."
 2. Perhaps they have stolen from you. You may seek justice, but you are not permitted to seek revenge
 3. Perhaps they have harmed a member of your family. Absalom could not forget what Amnon had done to his sister.
 4. Retribution may only be a matter of the heart. You want the person who harmed you to suffer. Perhaps you feel a sense of satisfaction when affliction strikes.
But this is the way of the world. God does not allow us to seek revenge.
- C. The world teaches personal revenge
1. There is something within us that makes us desire to retaliate when we are harmed. It is sin which flows forth from our pride and self-love.
 2. God does not allow us to seek the harm of those who harm us. We are allowed to seek justice, but not as a form of revenge. And justice is given to God's ministers of justice.
 3. We are inclined to take everything personally
As we are consumed by our own desire for vindication we forget that all sin is ultimately against God.
Psalms 51:4 NAU - "Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight"
 4. Is not God the ultimate One offended? Are we as zealous for His honor as our own? It is selfish sin and prideful to consider only ourselves as the victim.

III. Vengeance belongs to God alone because God is ultimately the one offended and He is the ultimate Judge.

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

A. When God says, "vengeance is mine" He is saying that He alone has the right to exercise vengeance because ultimately, He alone has been offended

1. God will execute perfect justice. There will come a time of retribution, either in this life or after.

Deuteronomy 32:35 NAU - "Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them."

2. We desire to retaliate when we are harmed. In our pride and self-love we want vindication. We want to stand before them as judge, jury, and executioner and we want to see them suffer.

3. God does not allow us to seek the harm of those who harm us. God alone has the power of vengeance.

B. Although we are not allowed to seek vengeance, we are surely allowed to seek justice.

1. It would have been proper for David to execute justice on behalf of Tamar. His love for his son blinded him to his duty as magistrate. Many a parent is blinded by their love for their children.

Amnon's sin was punishable by death, but not at the hands of Absalom.

2. God has raised up powers upon the earth upon whom He has delegated His authority. With these authorities God has vested the power of retribution. There is Civil authority and Ecclesiastical authority. With personal vengeance we sin by denying God's ordained chain of authority. We make ourselves the highest authority.

a. Civil authority has been endued with the power of executing justice and of administering retribution through the wielding of the sword.

Romans 13:4 NAU - "for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."

b. Ecclesiastical authority has been endued with the power of executing justice by way of excommunication.

Matthew 18:17 NAU - "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

3. Seeking justice, however, does not allow individual retaliation or personal retribution. Rather, we are to entrust this power to the God-ordained authorities.

C. We are permitted pray for God's justice upon those who have harmed us

1. We can pray for God's judgment against His and our enemies

William GT Shedd – “The apostolic dictum, *Vengeance is mine*, does not set aside, but confirms the prayers against enemies, in the so-called imprecatory psalms.”¹

- a. Some of the imprecatory Psalms are mild
Psalm 35:4-6 NAU - "Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life; Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me. ⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind, With the angel of the LORD driving *them* on. ⁶ Let their way be dark and slippery, With the angel of the LORD pursuing them."
 - b. Some are fierce calls for God's Divine retribution
Psalm 109:8-10 KJV - "Let his days be few; *and* let another take his office. ⁹ Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. ¹⁰ Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek *their bread* also out of their desolate places."
Psalm 58:6-8 NAU - "O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; Break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD. ⁷ Let them flow away like water that runs off; *When* he aims his arrows, let them be as headless shafts. ⁸ *Let them be* as a snail which melts away as it goes along, *Like* the miscarriages of a woman which never see the sun."
2. The righteous rejoice at the righteous vindication of God's glory as well as their own vindication.
1 Samuel 25:39 NAU - "When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal and has kept back His servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head."
 3. We must guard our hearts. Our chief rejoicing is for God's vindication, not our own
Proverbs 24:17-18 NAU - "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; ¹⁸ Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him."
 4. We must always leave room for mercy and patience with our enemy. Personal retribution supposes that we are without sin.

¹ Shedd, William G.T.. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Homewood: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007, Page 373.

III. What will protect us from seeking our own revenge?

- A. A heart of obedience towards God
1. This is what kept David from killing Saul
Exodus. 22:28 NAU - "You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people."
 2. God forbids us from taking revenge
Romans 12:19 NAS - "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."
 3. Remembering the Sixth Commandment would have restrained the vengeance of Absalom.
But Absalom had become a law unto himself.
- B. Love for our enemy.
Leviticus 19:18 NAU - "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."
1. Absalom's enemy was his own brother, and yet he could not forgive
 2. There is no grace in this passage
- C. Third, it demands faith in the sovereign judgment of God – to wait upon Him.
1. Enduring the attacks of wicked people is a great test of faith. It demands that we leave all retribution to God. It means that we trust Him to execute perfect justice
 2. Sometimes in this life justice seems to be lacking. Sometimes, wicked men and women continue their malicious deeds. Churches can close their eyes to sin or welcome individuals without regard to past behavior. In courts of law witnesses can be in error, prosecutors and defense attorneys can fail to make their cases, juries can make poor judgments, and judges can make mistakes.
Faith demands seeing all judgement in the hands of God. He will set all things right, either in this life or that which is to come. Nothing escapes His righteous sight.
 3. Rather than taking things in our own hands we are to recognize God as the Judge and leave all retribution to God.
- D. A desire to display Christ with our life
1. When Christ was slandered and maligned He remained silent
Isaiah 53:7 NAU - "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth."
 2. Can we not bear the reproach of men with patience and humility?
Richard Phillips – "A good test of our Christ-likeness is our response to those who speak ill of us or misrepresent our actions. If we have humbled ourselves at the cross, we will realize that the worst that others can say of us hardly compares to the true depth of our sin."²

² Phillips, Richard. *1 Samuel, Reformed Expository Commentary*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012, Page 429.

Conclusion:

1. We can be merciful and at the same time despise the wickedness upon the earth. We must always have a holy hatred of sin. There is a difference between moral repugnance and personal vengeance.
 - a. We can have a holy hatred of the sinner while at the same time be filled with pity and a desire for his salvation.
 - b. We can be angry over sin without being sinful in anger
Ephesians 4:26-27 – “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: ²⁷ Neither give place to the devil.”
2. Absalom seethed in this anger and hatred and it consumed him. We must guard our own heart. Vengeance is in the heart of us all. May God protect us, leaving all vengeance to Him.