Sermon Title: When God Feels Far Away
Series: Seeking God's Kingdom, Part 45
Scripture: 2 Samuel 13
Main Takeaway: Even when God feels far away, He sees us, hears us, remains near, and has not forgotten us.

Over the past several weeks we've seen David at his best…
Then as if out of nowhere…
He lets temptation get the best of him…
Which led down a path of one sin after another.

You know, someone asked me a couple weeks ago…

[SLIDE 1] ***Do you think David made it into heaven?***

It's a good question…
Especially considering the fact that the LORD accused David of despising the Word of the LORD, and the LORD Himself.

Because as he pursued his own desires…
And tried to cover up his sin…
He treated the Word of the LORD as if it didn't matter.

So there's no doubt…
David's guilty.

But as we saw last week…
He owned up to it.

He confessed and said: *I have sinned against the LORD.*
And Nathan responded: *The LORD has taken away your sin.*

So, is David in heaven?

[SLIDE 2] Yes! 100%!

David's forgiven!
Hebrews 11:32 even lists David among the faithful.

But here's something to think about:
David didn't earn his salvation by being a good enough person...

David was saved by God's grace.
He was saved by the same grace that saves us.

In fact, Romans 3 teaches that…

[SLIDE 3] The cross of Jesus Christ is the foundation of God's forgiveness, even for those who lived before Jesus came (Romans 3:22-26)

David didn't know Jesus like we know Him today…
But he knew Yahweh God.

And despite David's sins…
He never abandoned his ultimate allegiance to Yahweh.
He never turned away from the LORD to worship another god…
Like so many before and after him did.

And even when David went down that dark path…
The LORD pursued him through Nathan.

And when confronted with his sin…
David confessed.

He acknowledged that he had sinned against the LORD.
And the LORD forgave him.

Like all of us, David wasn't perfect…
But we've seen that he really was a man after God's own heart.

And unfortunately, we're about to see that…

[SLIDE 4] Not everyone in David's family had the kind of repentant heart he had for the LORD.

Now…
This is where we get into 2 Samuel 13.
I mentioned earlier that this is a hard chapter.
It deals with a level of violence that's difficult to talk about.
Honestly, it would've been a lot easier to skip this chapter.

BUT…

As hard as it is…
There's something important for us to see.

We're gonna meet someone who demonstrates remarkable courage and wisdom in the face of a terrible injustice.

[SLIDE 5] 2 Samuel 13:1 - In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David.

[SLIDE 5A] Family Photo

David is the father of Amnon, Absalom *and* Tamar.

Amnon was David's firstborn son.
His mom was Ahinoam.
But Absalom and Tamar's mom was Maacah.

So right away you can see the problem…

Amnon loved Tamar…
But they were half-siblings!

And unfortunately…

[SLIDE 6] 2 Samuel 13:2 - Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her.

That last line is chilling.

Amnon's "love" for his sister was an obsessive lust.

By today's standards…
And even ancient Israelite standards…
He's got serious issues.

Because according to Israelite Law (God's Word!)…
The kind of desire he felt for his sister was strictly forbidden…

For example, Leviticus 18:9 says - "'Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere."

Yet that's exactly what Amnon wanted.

And so this is where one of David's nephews enters the scene.

His name is Jonadab.
He was an advisor and friend to Amnon.

He could see that something was bothering Amnon.
And Amnon trusted him enough to admit his desire for Tamar.

You'd think that Jonadab would be like:
Man… you just gotta let that go…
That's forbidden…
You shouldn't even be thinking about that…

But instead, he helps Amnon come up with a plan to deceive David…
And get Tamar alone.
He said…

[SLIDE 7] 2 Samuel 13:5 - "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'"

So that's exactly what Amnon did…
Except he left out the part about specifically wanting to "watch her"...

And seeing that Amnon looked sick…
He sent word for Tamar to come and take care of him.
All she was supposed to do was prepare some food for Amnon.

So she made some bread…
But Amnon refused to eat.

Then he sent everyone except Tamar out of the room.

And when she tried to give him bread again…
He grabbed her and said…
"Come to bed with me, my sister."

By the way, that's a command in Hebrew.
Amnon wasn't asking… he was *commanding* her to do what he wanted.

So now she's in his grip.
She can't get away because he's too strong.

And as terrible as this moment is…
What she says next is what convinced me not to skip this scene.

She was just commanded by the firstborn of the royal household…
Her brother…
But rather than obey, she said…

[SLIDE 8] 2 Samuel 13:12-13 - "No, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you."

So she refused…
She appealed to God's Word (Israelite Law)...
She recognized it as an evil act…

And just in case Amnon actually did care for her…
She's like:
Think about what this will do to me!
How am I supposed to live with this kind of shame?

And if that wasn't enough…
She appealed to Amnon's pride…
Warning him that he'd become one of the wicked fools in Israel.

She's saying:
You might be the king's firstborn son…
But what you're about to do is absolutely disgraceful in the eyes of the LORD!

And, probably as a last resort…
She tries to convince him that David would actually let him marry her.

Personally, I don't think she believed this.
I think she was saying whatever she could to get out of the situation.

And unfortunately…
Her words didn't work.

But…

I have to say…
There's something about Tamar's words that really strikes me.

This is the only chapter in the Bible where we get to hear her speak.

So I can't help but think…
Why did the writer choose to preserve her words?

I wonder if it's because…
In what was probably the most horrific moment of her life…
She had the courage to speak truth.

She couldn't overpower Amnon.
She couldn't make him listen.
But, she recognized evil for what it was.

Tamar was in a situation where she was helpless…
Yet she refused to surrender to the evil that gripped her.

David's Psalm #10 comes to mind here…

[SLIDE 9] Psalm 10:2-4 - In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts about the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; <u>in all his thoughts there is no room for God</u>.

I don't know if David had his son Amnon in mind when he wrote this…

But it sure sounds like it.

“In all his thoughts there is no room for God.”

Amnon was obsessed with what he thought was his love for Tamar…
But now that he violated her…

[SLIDE 10] 2 Samuel 13:15 - Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her…

So he orders her to leave.

She again refuses because of the shame it would cause her.

So Amnon had her physically removed and locked out.

She then put ashes on her head and tore her robe…
And wept as she went away.

[SLIDE 11] (don’t read) 2 Samuel 13:20 - …Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman.

The scripture says she was a “desolate woman”...

“Desolate” describes something that’s devastated or laid to waste.

So Tamar wasn’t just hurt or sad…

Her life had been profoundly impacted by what Amnon did to her.

She had remarkable moral strength during the attack…
But unfortunately she wasn’t spared from suffering that would continue…
Probably for the rest of her life.

And so I have to wonder…

During times like this…

Where was the LORD?

Why didn’t the LORD intervene?

As David said…

[SLIDE 12] Psalm 10:1 - Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

He's wrestling with the same questions.

And unfortunately…

David doesn't get a direct answer.

But this is often how it goes with suffering.

It might *feel* like God is standing far off…

But the reality is…

He's always near.

David knows that.

But he's not afraid to pray according to how he feels.

That's such an important thing for us to remember…

We don't have to hide how we feel from God…

He already knows how we feel…

And it's prayers like David's that show us we can lay it all on Him.

Bringing painful questions to God isn't wrong…

Honestly, I'd say…

[SLIDE 13] Having the courage to ask God painful questions is an expression of our faith.

Because when we ask…

We're trusting that the LORD actually cares about how we feel…

Even if we don't get the answers we want.

And so David isn't afraid to ask the painful question…

But did you notice that his prayer doesn't stay in the uncertainty?

David moves into what he knows is true.

The wicked person thinks they're untouchable…

But David knows better.

That's why he prayed…

[SLIDE 14] Psalm 10:12 - Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless.

[SLIDE 15] Psalm 10:14 - You, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

What Tamar experienced was unthinkable.

Her suffering probably affected her for the rest of her life.

That's a reality.

But David's words remind us that God isn't distant.

The LORD sees us.

He knows our grief.

And He "takes it in hand"...

Meaning…
The LORD saw the injustice…
He considers her suffering…
And He's the One who has the power and authority to do something about it.

In fact, remember what Nathan said to David?

[SLIDE 16] 2 Samuel 12:10 - …the sword will never depart from your house…

If we were to keep reading chapter 13…
We'd see that Absalom eventually takes revenge on Amnon for the way he violated Tamar.

We'll see that Absalom's got his own heart issues…

But I wonder if the LORD used Absalom to bring His judgment down on Amnon?

After all…
Look at the end of Psalm 10…

[SLIDE 17] Psalm 10:17-18 - You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

Amnon will never again strike terror.

But the takeaway for us isn't that Amnon got what was coming to him.

It's that even when God feels far away…

He hasn't forgotten...

The LORD sees what's going on...

He hears the cries of His people…

And He's always near.

That doesn't change what happened to Tamar.

But it does give us confidence that she will not be forgotten.

Her words are forever preserved in the Word of God…

And nearly 3,000 years later…

We're still hearing her voice.

The voice of someone who suffered horribly…
But who recognized evil for what it was…
And had the courage to speak against it.

So what about us?

Atrocities happen every day.

Wars.
Famine.
Sickness.

And when it happens to us…
We might find ourselves asking God…
Where are You in this?

I asked that every day as my son suffered.

But you know what carries me forward?

Truth.

Truth that death does not get the final word.

The Apostle Paul said in…

[SLIDE 18] 1 Corinthians 15:26 - The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This will happen.

There will come a day when death no longer has the power to strike terror into people.

And even now…

Those of us who follow Jesus…

We don't have to be ruled by that kind of fear.

We will walk the path of suffering.

But Jesus walks it with us…

Strengthening us to move forward…

Through the suffering.

I often think of Paul's words…

[SLIDE 19] 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 - We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

That's the truth we live in as followers of Jesus.

He gives us the strength to keep moving.

And so I'll end with Paul's words…

[SLIDE 20] 2 Corinthians 4:16, 18 - Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day … So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Amen?

Let's Pray