

that out of the distress might come far greater things for the people of your country.

- *Fast and pray for any in your family who hold grudges and may be tempted to take out their vengeance on others who have wronged them. Pray for the circles of violence to be broken and for Christ to be honoured in people's personal relationships.*

Final Prayer

Bless my sleep this night, Lord Jesus. In the night hours when my body gains its necessary rest, work in its inner recesses to bring healing. In the slumber of my soul, restore the order and calmness of my mind and revive my spirit. Then, when I awake, may I be prepared for the new day confident in Your sustenance. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN.

Prayer

We can never tell what marvellously things You will do for us each day, Lord God, but Your faithfulness sustains us in body, soul and spirit.

Challenge us to do what is right each moment,
Invigorate us with the blessing of Your presence
and speak Your blessing into our hearts each day.

We pray this in the name of Christ our Saviour, who has opened our hearts and minds to the glories of Your Kingdom. Thank You, Lord God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Seasons

On-going prayers

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Meditation

What are the routines and habits by which you live your life?
What desires and which people influence your decisions?

Is it food or drink? Meals, at home or 'out'? The pub?
Is it family needs? Children? Parents? Spouse?

Is it work or the need to earn more money to pay bills?
Is it church? The work of holding office, or worshipping?

Is it the television; catching programmes you cannot miss?
Is it pastimes, such as holidays, the garden, sport or reading?

And how does Christ mould your life amidst its realities?
And what happens when 'life' and 'faith' clash; which wins?

Remember, the Lord knows your future as well as your present
By His challenges He guide us; He loves us, and He knows what's best.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 13:23-29

²³ Two year later Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and invited all the king's sons to come. ²⁴ Absalom came to the king, and said, 'Your servant has sheepshearers; will the king and his servants please join me?' ²⁵ But the king said to Absalom, 'No, my son, let us not all go, or else we will be a burden to you.' He pressed him, but he would not go; however, he gave him his blessing. ²⁶ Then Absalom persisted, 'At least let my brother Amnon come with us.' The king said to him, 'Why should he go with you?' ²⁷ Absalom pressed him until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.

Absalom then made a feast like the feast of a king. ²⁸ He commanded his servants, 'Watch when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, "Strike Amnon," then kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not myself

commanded you? Be courageous and brave.’²⁹ So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king’s sons rose, mounted their mules and fled.

Review

Amnon, the heir apparent to David’s throne, and his eldest son, had raped His brother Absalom’s sister, Tamar (13:1-22). More than this, he had done so with a shocking cruelty and arrogance, and it was an affront to Absalom and the whole of David’s court. We have already been told that David was very angry at what happened (13:21), but perhaps because of his own weakness with women, he was strangely reluctant to punish Amnon. He was the heir to his throne, and David took no action against him.

We can only imagine the seething anger which boiled away inside Absalom at what had happened, and the defaming of his own family within the wider family of the King’s court, and although it is not mentioned here, it becomes apparent later in 2 Samuel that Absalom developed a considerable disrespect for his father, King David, possibly because of his unwillingness to confront the obviously evil deeds of Amnon. It is highly likely that Absalom’s military coup, which temporarily dethroned his father and threw him out of Jerusalem, had its roots in this anger. Certainly, scriptures describe Absalom as skilled in hiding his real feelings and capable of plotting over a long period of time to achieve his own ends of vengeance and eventually taking the crown from his father’s head (15:1f. etc).

Absalom sets up the murder of Amnon Today’s story is about the murder of Amnon by Absalom’s servants. Although Absalom was very careful not to commit the murder himself, he plotted very carefully and manoeuvred Amnon carefully to a place where he could get his servants to do the job for him. In this way, he hoped to escape the direct responsibility and at worst, to flee swiftly to the security of Geshur, a place beyond the immediate reach of David’s security forces.

Absalom spent two years awaiting the right time to have his brother murdered. No reason is given for this, but perhaps it took this amount of time for him to be trusted by Amnon and David. It would have been obvious to David and Amnon that Absalom was holding this long term grudge against Amnon, and there is some indication that David himself did not entirely trust Absalom (13:26,27).

The event chosen by Absalom for retribution and vengeance was an annual celebration something like a harvest festival for sheep-shearing. Sheep shearing was one of many skills offered by hired agricultural labourers, and when the annual shearing was completed they celebrated the ‘harvest’ of wool as vigorously as any vineyard workers would celebrate a harvest of grapes! Absalom asked King David ‘and his servants’ (13:24) to join the celebrations; ‘servants’ probably meaning the other sons of David including Amnon. David was reticent and refused, offering the excuse that it would be a burden on Absalom to feed virtually the entire court over the several days of the feasting. Absalom was persistent and finally obtained permission from David for what he wanted, which was David’s consent for Amnon to attend.

The feast and the murder Some unspoken manoeuvring was going on through all this, and it was quite uncertain who knew what, about anything. It may be that that Absalom had tried to get Amnon away from David on a number of occasions, but this time, he succeeded. The story unfolds with alarming certainty, with Absalom now at liberty to wreak vengeance on his enemy. In all Absalom’s deeds however, one thing becomes clear, which is that he was able to present himself to those around him in the most regal manner. Verse 27 says in a not very subtle way that ‘Absalom made a feast fit for a king’, and soon after, he regally commanded his servant to dispatch Amnon when he became too drunk to know

what was going on around him. He attempted to stand above the whole matter as one with authority over life and death, and His words to his servants were chilling: ‘Have I not commanded you? Be courageous and brave’ (13:28).

We who know the story of 2 Samuel and anticipate what happens next are not surprised at these details, but they are an important part of the suspense in the story line which keeps us guessing about what will happen to the inheritance of David and the Covenant promise of God to David. God may have promised salvation to the world through David’s dynasty, but his own sons were set against each other and behaving like the spoilt squabbling heirs of any ancient mid-eastern country, not the bearers of God’s eternal blessings.

What was happening to David’s Kingdom? It is very important for us to have the long term view of scripture when reading a story such as this. It reminds us that we cannot take just take a sentence from any part of God’s Word and find within it some complete example of God’s eternal purposes. If we keep our eyes on the overall plot, however, we can then see how God works through the affairs of His people, even when strange and disturbing things are happening. David himself was thoroughly compromised by his bloody life and the sexual misdemeanours in which he had been involved. Who was he to lecture his sons about morality given all that he had done (which was probably common knowledge).

David was someone just like us, he had to live through difficult times. He, too, had to take a long term view of God’s work in his life and the life of his people, and this required him to demonstrate different qualities of trust and dependence upon the Lord. When he was at his peak, leading a successful band of God’s people against the ungodly King Saul, he often had to wait in order to do the right thing, and it was a lesson that he had to apply to the more personal life of his family. His own authority was compromised by his sin, but he was still able to wait upon God for the unfolding of history, and through it all, remain personally obedient to his Lord.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Is it possible to see the difference between leaders in politics today who are truly doing what is right for people or just pursuing their own interests?
2. What great truths about God and His relationship with people can you find in this text today?
3. Discuss what you believe David would have been feeling about the events unfolding under his nose?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It will probably be your experience that there are times when despite your good attempts to be a true disciple of Jesus, what happens around you at home or at work is far from a godly example of life. This is deeply frustrating, particularly when you cannot entirely separate yourself from responsibility for what is going on. Yet this is exactly the crucible of faith in which our discipleship is won, however hard it is. Waiting in the midst of uncertainty and distress is very difficult, but it has its part to play in helping each of us to find a way forward, as well as our being in tune with God’s will and knowing when to act.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you are aware of plotting and scheming in the politics of your country which will damage people, perhaps even kill them (e.g. Zimbabwe, China, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and various regions throughout the world), pray about these matters, and ask God*