

Law and Grace

2Samuel 14:1-33

The life of Aaron Burr is one of promise and tragedy.

He was born to Aaron Burr Sr., the second president of Princeton University, and his wife Esther, the daughter of Jonathan Edwards whom many regard as the greatest American theologian a man who was instrumental in the 18th century revivals known as the great awakenings.

Unfortunately, the godly influence of his parents and grandparents was cut short by their deaths when Aaron was still quite young.

He was raised in large part by an uncle and was able to get an education graduating college at age sixteen and later attending Princeton.

He fought with distinction in the American Revolution and later entered politics.

After serving in the army he practiced law in New York, he was elected to the state assembly in 1784 and became the state's attorney general in 1789.

Shortly after that he managed to win election to the United States Senate over a man named Philip Schuyler the father in law of one Alexander Hamilton which likely began their bitter political rivalry.

In the year 1800 Aaron Burr had managed to get elected the third Vice President of the United States and was nearly elected President falling just short to Thomas Jefferson.

It was Hamilton who played an important role in Jefferson being elected over Burr.

His ambitions lost him favour in his party and rather than pursuing a second term as vice president he decided to try for Governor of New York.

Hamilton again caused him defeat by circulating some derogatory information which resulted in Burr challenging Hamilton to a duel in New Jersey on July 11th 1804.

Hamilton was killed and since dueling was illegal arrest warrants were issued for Burr.

He fled to Louisiana, got wrapped up in what can only be described as treasonous affairs, ended up fleeing to Europe until 1812, and when he returned to New York got himself wrapped up in questionable practices and by the time of his death in 1833 he had never gotten free from the cloud of suspicion that hung over his life.

The promise of a godly heritage and education.

Achieving the second highest office in the land.

The tragedy of ambition and pride leading to ruin.

[Promise and tragedy are words that come to mind when I think of King David's son Absalom. He was a man of great promise but also a man of great pride. In our text this morning **2Samuel 14:1-33** we find Absalom living in exile on account of murdering his brother and we find David's nephew Joab trying to convince the king to extend grace to his son and have him return to Jerusalem. From what happens in this passage I want to draw our attention to four important lessons. The first thing that is plainly evident in this text is that...]

Point #1 – Breaking God's law makes life messy. (Verses 1-11)

When we fail to listen to what the LORD says it sometimes creates situations that are at best challenging to deal with.

As chapter 14 opens we are reminded of the messiness of King David's life. (Verse 1)

Why is the heart of the king going out to Absalom? Because his third born son has run away to his grandpa's house in a foreign country to a city called Geshur.

He had run away because he had murdered his brother, David's oldest boy named Amon, because he had violated his sister Tamar.

To say that David's family is messed up is an understatement to say the least.

On top of that we need to keep in mind David's own sins of multiple marriages, adultery, and murder which certainly contributed to the situation with Amnon and Absalom.

Ironically, Absalom's name means "my father is peace" and now his father's heart is in turmoil, and has been for some time, over the situation with his son.

Joab, the commander of the army, sees it and wants to do something about it.

Verses 2-4 tell us that Joab enlists the help of a "wise woman" from Tekoa.

How he knows her is left unsaid, the important thing is that he knows she is up to the task of acting out a parable before the king so that he might reconsider his stance towards Absalom.

Joab tells the woman to dress like a woman who has been "mourning many days" just as the king has been mourning many days.

Acting the part of a grieving widow, she comes to the king pays her respects and pleads for help at the end of verse four saying "Save me, O king."

Look with me at **verses 5-7** and let's listen in to the story she tells David.

The purpose of this story is not to mirror David's circumstance exactly, there are significant differences between what the woman puts before the king and what Absalom had done.

The purpose is to get the king to consider what, in Joab's mind, is the bigger picture.

The man who killed his brother should be punished, but if he is punished then the widow will be left alone and the family inheritance which is tied to the covenant promises of God will be lost.

Breaking God's law had created a messy situation in this parable and David recognizes it right away.

In his judgement, as seen in verses 8-11, the abandonment of the widow and the loss of the land would be the worse course of action so he is willing to intervene and keep her son from the penalty of his actions.

He even goes as far to invoke the name of the LORD in an oath to that effect in verse 11 to satisfy the plea of the woman pretending to be a widow.

Is it good that the man kills his brother? No. Would it be good to leave the woman alone and leave her family cut out of the Promised Land? No. It is messy and it is messy because God's law was broken.

[That's David's situation and he contributed to the messiness. It was his job as Amnon's father and the king to act in justice when Tamar was assaulted and he failed to act. Had Absalom been a godly man he would have spoken up and asked for justice, but instead he plots and conspires for revenge which ends in murder. Should David condone that? No! Does that mean he should lose another son? It is a messy situation.]

The same thing happens to us to varying degrees when we break God's laws.

Just look at the state of the family in our culture today.

I read an article on the National Institute for Health's website, which is not an organization known for promoting Biblical values, and the article was making the case for the traditional family and how children have far better outcomes with one mom and one dad who love each other and stay married to one another.

The article stated that in 1920 90% of children made it to the age of 18 in a traditional home but in 2020 only 30% of children can say the same.

What has been the result of breaking God's laws in regards to family relationships? A lot of messiness.

The same can be said for every area of life.

[Now I want to be clear and say that not all messy situations are the result of breaking God's laws. The Bible surely shows us that hardship and suffering happens to even the most faithful of God's people. What we are supposed to see here is that when we break God's laws it makes a mess of our lives. If your life looks like a dumpster fire this morning I want you to ask yourself a simple question, "Have I been trying to do things God's way or have I been

following my sinful desires?” Thankfully no matter where we might find ourselves this morning there is hope for us in the word of God. We can see that as this conversation continues between the king and the woman from Tekoa. What is said between them shows us that...]

Point #2 – Only grace can help someone who breaks God’s law. (Verses 12-24)

Once an evil act has been committed it cannot be undone or erased; therefore, the LORD must extend undeserved favour if the sinner is to have any hope at all.

The King’s solemn promise in the name of the LORD to offer complete protection to the son of the woman is barely out of his mouth and the woman says this to him in verses 12-13.

Her comment here about David’s plans being ‘against the people of God?’ supports the idea of some commentators who think Joab’s employment of this woman has as much to do with politics as it does concern for the heart of the king.

It is quite possible that Absalom would be considered to be the next in line to the throne at this point in history.

What would happen if David died while Absalom was in exile? It could very likely plunge the nation into another civil war and put it once again at the mercy of the surrounding enemy nations.

Her point is that keeping Absalom in exile is putting the nation at risk.

The king can easily see the need to maintain the inheritance of the widow and her son which she reiterates in 15-17, but her argument is that he does not see the need to act for the good of the nation.

She then adds this to her argument in **verses 14**.

She reminds the king of the fallen condition of humanity and the certainty of death.

Water being poured out on the ground is a vivid picture of finality. Once it is poured out it sinks into the ground and it is gone.

This is perhaps her way of pointing to the urgency of the situation. If David choses to keep his course fixed there will soon come a day when it will become impossible to change.

She then points him to the LORD. “God will not take away life...” In light of what she just said about life being like poured out water, we should take this to mean He often does not take life right away, but instead He “devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.”

That phrase should turn our minds back to the Garden of Eden.

Adam broke God’s law and was cast out, but even there the LORD promised One would come to make things right.

David’s mind might be turned to his own experience of God’s grace after he sinned against the LORD.

Think of what he prays in Psalm 51 as he confesses his sin before the LORD, he prays,
“Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.”

On what grounds can he make that plea having broken the law of the LORD?
 Can he undo what had been done? No, the only ground he has is God’s
 grace.

Hearing the woman’s argument David puts the pieces together and
 asks her if Joab put her up to this in verses 18-20.

In verses 21-23 David summons Joab grants his request and has
 Absalom brought back to Jerusalem.

The grace he offers according to verse 24 is somewhat
 reserved as Absalom must remain in his own house and
 not come into the presence of the king, but even so grace
 is extended to him.

That is the only back for the law breaker.

[It is very much like choosing to jump off a boat in the middle of the ocean. Have you ever
 jumped off a decent size boat where the deck of well above the water? If there is nothing to
 hold onto it is impossible to get back in. The only hope you have at that point is for someone to
 throw you a life line.]

While the grace of King David here does Absalom some good. The grace of our God in
 Christ is so much better.

Like Absalom our law breaking makes us outcasts in the court of the living God,
 but unlike David the LORD is perfect in all He does and never compromises His
 law in the slightest degree.

The only thing we deserve from God is death and eternal judgement in hell.
 We are outcasts and yet God devised a way to bring us back to
 Himself.

His plan was to send God the Son, Jesus Christ, into the world
 to pay the penalty of our law breaking in full so that God’s
 Justice could be perfectly maintained and yet we could also be
 made right with Him because Jesus’ blood washes away our
 disobedience.

Does He do that because we deserve it?

Not at all. It is completely according to His grace
 given on account of His eternal love which He has
 set of those He is resolved to redeem to Himself.

[What else can possibly help us? No one can undo their law breaking. Our only hope is for the
 LORD to be gracious towards us and He is to those who are in Christ. That is amazing and we
 ought to be awed by it, but the sad reality is that not everyone is. We can see that in Absalom.

In verses 25-27 we are given some information about the king's son which gives us some insight into what he does next. What we are told and what happens shows us that...]

Point #3 – Pride hardens the heart towards God's laws. (Verses 25-30)

When a person makes much of himself in his own mind he tends to easily disregard the rule of the LORD over life.

Listen to the description of Absalom in verses 25-27.

That is quite the description. He is hands down the best looking dude in the whole nation of Israel.

While it is possible to possess great external beauty and humility it seems far more common that remarkable appearance and pride are found together.

Several commentators believe that is the writer's purpose in the description of the man's hair.

If the only purpose were to foreshadow his demise, the length of his hair would have been sufficient, but we are given the added detail that Absalom waits to cut his hair until it was 'heavy upon him.'

Interestingly enough the word for 'heavy' in Hebrew is very closely related to the word translated as 'glory'.

So the image here is that Absalom allowed as much glory to be put upon his head until he couldn't bear it anymore and then he did it all over again.

The ESV translates the time frame as 'every year' but the phrase in Hebrew may also mean "from time to time."

On top of that he did more than just cut his hair, he also weighed it.

The weight is rather dramatic recorded here as 200 shekels which according to the commentators that I read weighed anywhere from 3-5lbs.

That is a lot of hair and his purpose in weighing it is to point to his own glory.

Matthew Henry notes that the historian Josephus records that it was common for people in that period to put oil in their hair along with powder and wealthy people would sometimes use gold dust as well which helps explain the significant amount of weight recorded.

Are you getting the picture of vanity and pride that the author intends?

Verse 27 tells us of his three sons and his beautiful daughter named Tamar who reminds us of the whole messy situation and then we are told this in **verses 28-30**.

God's word actually talks about a situation like this.

It Exodus 22:6 it says "If a fire breaks out...so that the stacked grain or standing grain or the field is consumed, he who started the fire shall make full restitution."

The sense of that verse is a fire getting out of control accidentally. The purpose of the law reflects God's concern to protect the fruit of someone's labour and their livelihood.

How much worse is it to intentionally set fire to your neighbor's field simply for the purpose of getting his attention?

Instead of patiently waiting on the LORD Absalom's view is, "How dare Joab ignore me!"

He doesn't care one bit about what God says about other people's property because he is full of vanity and pride.

[I'll never forget sitting in a meeting a number of years ago and an issue was raised about how a church practice didn't line up with what the Scripture says. Someone sitting across the table said, "I want to leave it the way it is?" Someone asked, "Doesn't it matter that it doesn't line up with the Bible?" The person said, "I don't care I want it the way it is!"]

I would suggest to you this morning that this problem is more common than we might want to admit.

How often do we get upset because things are the way we want?

Why do we struggle to turn the other cheek or carry a pack the first mile let alone the extra mile?

Why do we clamor to be first in the line?

Why do we covet, lie, and cheat?

Why do we get angry and say mean things particularly to those we are closest to?

Because we put ourselves first in our own mind.

[I don't know about you, but for me this is a constant battle! I am so thankful for the Holy Spirit Who is constantly at work through His Word in the hearts of His people softening us towards what the LORD desires for us. If not for grace we would go quickly in the way of Absalom who offers us another warning as this chapter comes to a close. When we read the last few verses in light of the context that follows in chapter fifteen we find that...]

Point #4 – An unchanged heart trivializes grace. (Verses 31-33)

When someone feels little or no sorrow or is quick to justify himself he tends to take the mercies of the LORD for granted.

Without a doubt Joab had a good idea of what Absalom wanted from him and had decided that he had done enough in getting the king to agree to let him come home from Geshur.

Being ignored wasn't something Absalom, being a prideful and as we will see ambitious man, would tolerate.

Setting Joab's field on fire did the trick as we read in **verses 31-32**.

There is something subtle in what Absalom says here that is important to pick up on.

Let's remember that Joab is the commander of the armies of Israel.

He is a battle hardened soldier who gives commands of life and death on the regular basis.

He is someone who would only have to answer to the king himself, and yet Absalom acts here as if he is free to command Joab.

Do you see it there in verse 32? He says, "I sent word to you "Come here...".

That is a command. What does it say if Absalom feels that he can command the commander of the army who answers only to the king?

It says Absalom feels he should have the same authority as the king.

Notice also what he says at the end of the verse.

He says, "...let me go into the presence of the king and if there is guilt in me let him put me to death."

What is he doing there? He is seeing himself as innocent in his own eyes and he is likely as one commentator puts it, "playing on the affections of his father."

Did he have a legitimate complaint about what Amnon did to Tamar?
Absolutely.

Was there a case to be made for the severest of punishment to be carried out against his older brother? Again yes.

Was it for him to carry out in conspiracy and deceit? No! And yet he sees himself as innocent in his own eyes.

Bound and determined he comes to David in **verse 33**.

On the surface things look pretty good there.

He bows in the presence of the king just as Joab does in verse 22 and the woman from Tekoa does in verse 4.

It is a sign of humility and respect.

Here is the thing, it is possible to bow your face but harden your heart.

What does he get from David?

He gets grace. David kisses his son which clearly signifies his full restoration in the court of the king.

For five years there had been separation between son and father and grace had now given the opportunity for restoration.

It looks like a happy ending until you realize in the next chapter that Absalom uses David's forgiveness to put a plan into motion to take the kingdom by force and is willing to kill his father.

The grace he received means little to nothing to him because his prideful heart remained unchanged in his exile.

[Remember the parable Jesus told about an unmerciful servant? He was forgiven an unimaginable sum of money by his master but was unwilling to forgive a comparably small sum owed to him by a fellow servant. What was his problem? He treated the grace of his master like a small thing!]

Do we do that?

Do we think of God's forgiveness in Christ as a small thing?

That is a clear sign of an unchanged heart.

If you feel no grief or conviction for your sin, if you feel little love for the LORD Jesus or His people it is very likely because you have little or no appreciation for His Grace because your heart is still dead in sin.

How much greater is the grace of God in Christ than the grace of a flawed king towards his son?

How can that be a small thing in the heart of the One who has truly trusted Christ?

It can't be!

If we are honest, we have all made a mess of life to one degree or another because we have all broken God's laws to one degree or another.

If we only had the law we would all be lost, but praise the LORD there is grace.

It is by grace that the LORD convicts us of pride and gives us a desire for obedience rather than rebellion.

When we treasure grace we know our hearts have been changed and we belong to the One Who lives forever and reigns over all things.

The Bible says in Psalm 19 that, "*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;*⁸ *the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;*" (Ps. 19:7-8 ESV)

Those are glorious words. Do you know why we can enjoy them? Because of the grace of God.

May that be the treasure of our hearts for our good and God's glory.