

“Desperate Households”

2 Samuel 14:25-33

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+samuel+14:25-33

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The title for today is “Desperate Households,” a takeoff, if you will, on the popular TV series.

Listen to the story of a desperate household, straight from the Bible. It’s about King David, whom Scripture calls Israel’s greatest king, a man after God’s own heart, but whose personal choices would lead to unspeakable tragedy, both for his family and the country he ruled.

One day David’s oldest son Amnon, the first in line to the throne, commits an act of domestic violence against his half sister Tamar. Crushed and confused, the young woman goes to her abuser’s brother Absalom (Remember that name.) who tells her to not say a word to anyone. Don’t talk about this horrible thing. And so the tragedy begins.

Their father, King David, hears about it and is furious, but apparently does nothing himself. Maybe his own affair with Bathsheba and its repercussions still weigh heavily on his heart, but for whatever reason he joins the conspiracy of silence and doesn’t talk about it either.

So here’s this incredibly horrible thing, and no one says a word. For two years. No one talks, but no one forgets, either.

Eventually, Absalom gets his revenge. He murders his brother who had violated his half sister, and then runs off to a foreign country to escape prosecution. And the tragedy builds.

David, of course, is crushed yet again. It’s like he lost two sons. Hardly a day goes by that he doesn’t grieve, but again, apparently still doesn’t address it. And Absalom is gone for three years. Two years waiting for revenge, and then a murder. Now three years away from home in self imposed exile, if you will. And still, no one talks about it, at least openly. And the tragedy builds.

What do you suppose has been going on in the young woman’s mind all this time?

Next come behind the scenes maneuvers on the part of the king’s military chief of staff, and Absalom makes it back home to Jerusalem. His father, King David, learns of his return, but wants nothing to do with him, and two more years go by. Still no one talks about it. And the tragedy continues to build. Seven years have gone by now.

At last there's a contrived reunion of sorts, and David and Absalom come face to face. On the surface it looks like reconciliation, but it's not to be.

Absalom's feelings of rejection continue to grow, the tension becomes too overpowering, and at last he comes up with a plan to overthrow his father the king and assume the throne himself.

The plan is set in motion, and for a time David indeed leaves his throne and runs for his life along with a small group of supporters and mercenaries, and all appears lost.

King David lived in a desperate household. Do you know of any?

Marc Cherry, the creator of the Desperate Housewives television series, was asked how he'd describe Wisteria Lane, where much of the show takes place. He said this:

"Picture perfect, wholesome. There's something so unrelentingly friendly about it....I kind of think of America that way. I think we aspire to be this idyllic place....where you can grow up in communities and raise your kids, and everyone can be nice to each other....The reality is there's a lot of dark stuff going on....and that makes for the essential truth of the show."¹

We look at a story like King David and his family and think what a horrible chain of events.

How could people not see what was going on?

How could it get so out of hand?

And yet it happens all the time, maybe even with some of us.

The older I get, the more I think one of the big obstacles to healing desperate households has to do with the faces we present to the world.

Think of the church faces we see, and the ones we put on ourselves. We're a bunch of sharp looking folks. We dress ourselves up, scrub behind the ears, brush our teeth, and say hello to friends. We pray the prayers and sing the hymns. Liturgy is spoken and the timeless beauty and truth of Scripture read.

Everything looks good, and sometimes that's the problem, because the reality is something less.

¹"A Stroll Down Wisteria Lane" Desperate Housewives: The Complete First Season DVD, Disc 1

Friends, it's possible to come to a place like this with a heart filled with fear or loneliness or disappointment, go through the paces, and leave with all the baggage you brought in with you. Too many of us live in desperate households, and no one knows.

Every now and then someone will gradually drift away from church. They're around less and less until they're not here at all. And sometime down the road our paths cross, or maybe we set up a time to get together, and of course the conversation rolls around to what's been happening. One of the most typical responses goes something like this:

"It's just that everyone looks so perfect, and I'm not. I feel like such a failure." And the irony is that of all places and all people, this should be the first that we turn to, but way too frequently it's the last.

Times get tough, and we withdraw. We pull away. We distance ourselves from the very thing we need the most.

I've got my church face on. Or maybe it's my school face. Or my work face. It helps me hide. And what I don't understand is that it only makes things worse, sometimes tragically so. Listen to how it happened with Absalom:

There wasn't a man in all Israel talked about so much for his handsome good looks—and not a blemish on him from head to toe! When he cut his hair—he always cut it short in the spring because it had grown so heavy—the weight of the hair from his head was over two pounds! **(2 Samuel 14:25-26, The Message)** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+samuel+14:25-26)

Stud muffin! Who wouldn't want to be like that? Surrounded by peer pressure, it's amazing what we'll do to try to be popular, to fit in, or to just get by.

But check this out. When the end came for Absalom, he was riding his mule but got his head caught in some low tree branches which made him an easy target.

It's entirely possible that this gorgeous hunk of a guy got hung up by the very thing he worked so hard to maintain, the face he put on.

Do you know anyone like that? To the outside world we have our handsome homes, we look good, we do religious things, but something's wrong, something's terribly wrong. Behind all that is a desperate household. And no one talks. And no one knows.

David did get his kingdom back, but at the cost of his son. Where there should've been great rejoicing as he regained the throne, instead was devastation. As they retook the city, David actually ordered that there be no celebration. Heartache hovered over the throne from then on. It didn't have to

be this way. But right from the start no one talked about it, at least openly. And the tragedy built to where it came to this, where a family and an entire country would never be the same.

Take a look at a few open-ended statements, and think of how you might respond. Maybe even write out a few of these.

If people really knew.....

I wish I could feel better about.....

I'm so tired of pretending.....

I work to provide good things for my family but my family is.....

Keeping this secret is.....

And then, My Prayer:

This sermon will end on a strong note of hope. And remember, friends, hope is always a choice, more than it is a feeling. It's a decision, or a series of decisions.

What David did in the midst of his tragedies was absolutely right on target. He took his desperation and broken heart to God. Two of the masterpieces of Scripture, Psalms 51 and 3 were written in the context of personal failure and tragedy. There, friends, is true greatness.

Relational healing is hard work. Desperate households usually get that way over time. You begin the journey to healing when you stop blaming or excusing and start coming to terms with reality.

Get in a small group, friends. I know you have them here. Discover the gift of courageous vulnerability.

Be willing to do the hard work of counseling. Pastor David can help refer you to someone. I can also speak from personal experience about how important this can be, since I've been in counseling relationships myself. It takes work, but it's worth every bit of it.

It doesn't have to be this way.

It's what resurrection is about.

Jesus died so that your desperate household can be healed.