

Father/Son Relationship O.T.

No Regrets

February 14, 2010

II Samuel 18:19-33

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

Researchers have found that the single most expressed emotions in daily conversation is love. You might expect that. Child to a parent. A friend to a friend. Expressions of caring and affections are more common than anything we say.

The second most commonly expressed emotion expressed on a daily bases kind of surprised me. It is regret. *I wished I had shown up on time. I wished I spoken up. I wish I hadn't eaten so much. I wish I was saving my money. I wish I completed school. I wish I stayed with my piano lessons.*

The list goes on and on.

Regret is as common as love. It has an **unique sting to it**. You wish things would have turned out different.

There is a difference between being disappointed and regret.

Disappointment is being a fan of the Chicago Cubs where I have to live with the memories of the

* 1969 Fall

* 1984 heartbreak

* 2003 With only 5 more outs. Steven Bartman, a fan, tried to catch that foul ball, not allowing Cubs outfielder Moisés Alou to catch the ball. May the Billy Goat curse hang over Steve Bartman's head for the rest of his life. That is disappointment.

Regret is far different. What makes regret so hard to bare is the fact is that **I had the power within myself self to make things different, to change the course of action**. But for whatever reason I didn't act upon it. Now I have to live with the results.

* Summer of 1978 I had the opportunity to go to the **Tikal Maya Ruins**. Pyramids in Guatemala. I didn't go.

* A more serious regret. Christmas of 1996, my mother was dying. I was debating whether to go down before Christmas or after Christmas. I made a decision to go after Christmas to go see her in Pascaguoula, MS. At the time I was living in Chicago. I regret that . That would have been the last time that my sister and I, mom and dad would have been together on Christmas Day.

The fact is, if we are honest we live with regrets. Some are minor, but some are devastating.

We don't like to talk about regrets because it is painful. It is an opportunity for us to learn or for us to be introspective and ask the question:

If I continue down this road, if I keep making the same decision, if I don't be proactive, what is my life going to be like in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years or when I come to the end of my life.

It pushes me to ask:

* What do I need to do?

* What changes need to take place today?....

so that I will not end up in a spot that I don't want to be in.

Or worse yet, end up in a place in life that I regret.

The best time to address regret is **BEFORE** it happens. Unfortunately we are quick to jump out of the frying pan and into the fire.

This is a series on Father/Son relationships. Last week we talked about the Prodigal Son. Even though the son was wasteful, and hurt the father deeply, when the opportunity came for the father to welcome his son back home, he did. When the father and son were reunited, I'm sure we can safely say, there was no regrets on the father's part.

Sad to say, reconciliation doesn't always take place. Restored relationships are sometimes never restored. Far too often people go to their graves with deep emotional wounds.

This morning there is a father in the Old Testament who lived with deep regrets. It is probably one of the most painful stories of regret in the Old Testament. It comes from a man, of all people, David.

It is not so much of what he did but what he didn't do. It is summed up in a single word that needed to be said. For whatever reason, pride, hurt, David couldn't get himself to say that one word but didn't get said until it was too late. Only when his son Absalom was killed was he able to bring himself to say that one word. A word that Absalom wanted to hear, but never heard..

This morning we are going to look at this father/son relationship that is heart wrenching. In Sunday School, Daryl has been talking about the family of Jacob and how it was terribly dysfunctional.

I will submit to you that David's family was probably worse. The issues in David's family were not restricted to adultery, polygamy, but substance abuse, years of total estrangement, vandalism, open hatred, rape, murder, and incest. Anybody here have a family that tops that list? And here is where I want to pick up this story:

This is sometime after the story of David and Bathsheba.

Amnon is now David's oldest son, and he experiences this intense physical desire. He lusts after Tamar so much the Bible says, that he became physically ill. It turns out that Tamar is Amnon's half-sister.

A first cousin of Amnon, Jonadab, comes along and ask him, *What's the matter. Why the gloomy look?*

Amnon tells him of his deep love for Tamar.

The Bible says that Jonadab was a crafty sort of person and he suggest to Amnon a plan. He says, *Go to your father, King David, and pretend that you are sick. Then tell your father that you will feel so much better if Tamar can prepare and cook some food and feed it to you. Then you can lure her into bed.*

Here is the sad thing about this situation, David doesn't know what is going on here. He's oblivious to the family dynamics. David says okay. He gives his stamp of permission for this to happen.

When Tamar arrived at Amnon's house, she went to the place where he was lying down so he could watch her mix some dough. Then she baked his favorite dish for him. But when the time came for him to eat he refused. He told all the servants standing around, to get out. Now it was just the two of them.

Just as she was feeding him, he grabbed her and demanded, *"Come to bed with me, my darling sister."* Tamar begs him not to do it. *Don't bring this wickedness to Israel and shame to me.* He refused to listen. Rapes her. Rape is such a hard word.

One of the definition of rape is: *an act of plunder, violent seizure,*

Immediately the disposition of Amnon changes from "Love" to hate.

Verse like **II Sam. 13: 15** pushes me to become a die heart Calvinist of believing in the depravity of man. *Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that his hatred for her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, Get up and get out!* Amplified Bible.

Tamar begs the second time. **No!** She says, *This will be a greater evil than what you just did to me.*

But the Bible says, he would not listen to her. He calls to his servants, *Put this woman out of my presence now, and bolt the door after her!* The servants had to drag her out, kicking and screaming.

And noticed how he referred to her at that moment. Not Tamar. Not my sister. *This woman.* Lust has a way to depersonalize women, making them into objects. The first time she walked through the door and now was dragged out, she is now a shattered woman. Physically, emotionally, spiritually.

It appears that she is the only one that shows integrity and courage and she tells her father what happened.

Now, in that culture, as all too often in our culture, it takes remarkable courage for a woman to do this because she doesn't have any power. What if people don't believe her? But she tells the truth at great risk because she trusts her dad, and she waits for David, who has all the power of the throne behind him to bring

justice... to do something, to say something, to stand up for her, to show just a little measure of the courage that she has already shown.

David becomes extremely angry, but he does nothing.

Tamar lived with her brother, Absalom, not with her dad. Days, weeks, months, and they think, *Surely, the king will do something. Surely, my father will take action.* Silence.

You look at Amnon's behavior. He lusted after a woman, he wanted her, he took her, and he thought he could use his own power and his own position to take what he wanted from her and then discard her.

Where do you think he might have gotten an idea like that? Maybe from his father? Apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. Maybe David is embarrassed and compromised by his own history. For whatever reason, at the moment in his life as a father when he most needed to do something, he was passive. He did nothing.

Regret doesn't always come from things that we were ashamed of doing, but regret can also come from things that we should have done, but did not do. When sin is not dealt with directly, it always leads to more damage. It always leads to more sin. It always does, and that is what happens here.

Two years pass. Two years of humiliation for Tamar. Two years of passive fury for David. But two years of brooding vengeance for Absalom. Absalom is becoming a very dangerous man. He decides that if his father is too gutless to do anything; he will take matters into his own hands.

So, Absalom throws a big sheep shearing party and he convinced his father to allow all his brothers to attend the party. At the party Absalom says to his servants, *"First get Amnon drunk, and then we'll kill him."*

Absalom avenges his sister by killing his half-brother, and since Amnon was at this point the oldest son, this also opened the way up for the next oldest son to be heir of the throne. Guess who the next oldest son was? Absalom. Amnon is killed and Absalom goes into hiding. For three years he lives in exile.

Here is the irony of the whole thing. The Bible says, *"And the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom."* But he did not go. He stayed home. He did nothing. Human beings are funny. We do the same thing.

Finally, Joab, who is the chief of staff, intervenes, and he gets David to promise that if Absalom comes back out of exile to Jerusalem that he won't be harmed. David makes that promise, but then he makes another enormous mistake.

Remember last week, of the **prodigal son**. The prodigal son is coming home the father runs to meet him, just can't wait to see him. He showers the son with affection even before he can get one word out.

Look at the contrast here, Absalom comes back to Jerusalem and what was David's response. Did he go out and meet his son with open arms. David says, *"He must go to his own house; he must not see my face."*

Then the Bible says, *'So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king.'*

The language is so heartrending. *"He must not see my face."* A boy wants to see his dad's face. When Absalom most needed to see his father's face, when he most needed somebody to listen to him, to his hurt, to his confusion, to his hatred, to his anger, to his love, to all that mess inside of him, he was not allowed to see his father's face. David was not there.

I wonder who needs to see your face. I wonder who needs you just to listen, just listen to all the junk inside. Day after day for two years, Absalom lives in the same city as his father, and his heart is breaking. So close but so far away. There is this wall between them, and they're living in the same town, and he never sees his father's face. I've talked to a number of people who refuse to speak to another person for whatever reason. They both live in the Village of Fredonia.

It is driving Absalom crazy, where eventually he forces a meeting by setting fire to the royal fields when he can't get to his dad any other way. And again, the chief of staff, Joab, intervenes. *"What the heck are you doing?"* Absalom responded, *I wanted to get my father's attention?*

We do the same thing. A child acts out in school in order to get attention. Husband starts argument with

his wife in order have intimacy with her.

So Joab sets up a meeting between Absalom and David, but they never discuss what needed discussing. The issues were never resolved and Absalom left his father feeling more frustrated, angry. Absalom spends the next several years in Jerusalem undermining his father. He would stand at the gate where people would come for help, where they would come for justice, and Absalom would say to them, "*You know, your case is valid. I feel for you, but there is no way to get to the king. The system is broken. If only I were in charge, I'd watch out for you.*"

And he was handsome and full of charisma like his father had once been. When people would bow before him, Absalom would stop them and raise them up and embrace them like they were equals.

And so, the text says Absalom "*stole the hearts of the people.*" And he seized power, and now David, the king, the father, has to go into exile and run for his life because of his son.

And again, it's a very heart wrenching story. It'll show you how low the relational breakdown came to and the hatred inside Absalom is. Following advice Absalom set up a pavilion on the roof of the palace. Without me going into further detail, I'll just read what the Bible says in II Sam 16:20 & 21

Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give us your advice. What should we do?" Ahithophel answered, "Lie with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench in your father's nostrils, and the hands of everyone with you will be strengthened."

Verse 22, *So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.*

It just shows the tremendous anger that Absalom had towards his father. He wanted to humiliate his father in the most degrading way that he can think of. This is the most in-your face thing that he can do. This humiliating act comes from a heart that is broken, twisted, and confused.

Imagine what happens to David when he hears about this. Where did Absalom learn to treat women this? Again the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree.

David has to flee for his life into the wilderness. He'd been there before when he was young and King Saul was old. Now, David is the old man, and Absalom is the young one. Now David, who was a warrior from a youth, now David, who has led so many campaigns against so many enemies has to lead one more, this one against his son...against his son.

And there is a big battle, and David's soldiers won't let him go into it. "*Too risky,*" they say, and he has to stay behind, and he is desperate. Can you imagine his heart wanting to know what happened with the battle?

David sat there, waiting and waiting for any type of news of what is happening. Finally a watchman who was standing at the top of the tower yells down to David. A messenger is coming. Then a few minutes later, the watchman yells down again to David and said there is another messenger coming.

David interprets this as good news.

The first thing that David says to the messenger, *Is the young man Absalom safe?"*

That messenger got cold feet and basically said, *I saw great confusion.* He didn't have the guts to tell David that his son was killed.

David said, let me listen to what the other messenger has to say. When that messenger arrived, David asks, *Is the young man Absalom safe?"* The messenger replied, *May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.* Immediately David knew that his son, Absalom was killed.

The different translations that describe David's immediately reaction are:

- * The king was shaken. NIV
- * The king was overcome with emotions. NLT
- * The king was deeply moved. NKJV

Here's the great tragedy.

Before the battle began, David's words to his general were, "*Be gentle with the young man Absalom,*" And when the battle is over, and a messenger comes running to him, David's question is not, "How did the battle go?" His first question is, "*Is the young man Absalom safe?*"

And now, finally comes that moment of clarity when all the stubbornness and pride and hardness is just shattered by reality. The text makes it so clear, without any doubt, that David was so grief stricken that he wept and he wept and wept and then he wept some more. It is only then that David was finally able to bring himself to say that one word. Only then when Absalom was dead, and it was too late for him to hear it. That one word that Absalom had been longing to hear throughout his whole adult life; The word, son.

The Bible says, in II Sam 18:33, some of the most heart-wrenching words of all of Scripture.

O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!" NIV

Shaken, because David suddenly sees so clearly the regret of not having a father/son relationship.

* He sees that baby that he held so long ago in a way that a parent will.

* He sees a child who adored his father. He remembers the little boy reenacting the story of his father and Goliath. *Look daddy, look at me. I'll kill the giant.*

David thinks of all that could have been but will never be.

* He thinks of the father that he wanted to be, that he might have been, but never was.

* He thinks of all the stupid choices that he made, all the wrong roads that he went down, all the words that he should have said to Absalom but didn't.

And finally, he pronounces the word that he could not bring himself to say all these years. And suddenly, it is as if he cannot stop saying this word, My Son.

It's like he has been storing it up all these years, and now he has to say it over and over and over and over even though his heart breaks every time he says it. "*O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!*"

I wonder...what is your word? What is that word that you need to say to someone today. If you're just honest, if you just let God speak to you, where might you be headed for regret if your life doesn't change?

* Are you getting too close to that line called sin?

If you don't turn back I can guarantee you are going to get burn. Whether it's lying, cheating. Truth be known you might be described as an amoral person, a person who has no moral standards, or restraints. Just indifferent to questions of right or wrong. If you are, it's going to lead to an immoral life with deep regret.

* Maybe you are involved in some questionable sexual behavior and you have you started crossing little lines. Get off that road.

* Maybe God is calling you to take a risk, and you've been shrinking back out of fear, and you're going to get to the end of your life and say, "*God, why didn't I trust You? Why did I let fear hold me back from keeping me from not doing the thing that You wanted me to do to serve You?*"

* Maybe there is a hard conversation with somebody that you have been avoiding, and you know...I mean, God is telling you right now, "*You get to the end of your life without doing that, there is going to be a pile of regret.*"

* Maybe there is a confession, just a load of guilt or garbage or whatever on your heart, and you know it's time to clean it up. If you're on a train headed for a station called "Regret" it's time to get off that train.

One of the most **powerful images of hell** is that...Jesus would use this sometimes...it is a place of weeping and wailing and remember what else? Gnashing of teeth. **Now, that is a very vivid physical typically Hebrew picture of regret.** And you'll see that just in little mistakes people make.

That is why I hate golf. On the golf course you hear the gnashing of teeth. *Grrrrnnn*. It's a physical image of "*Oh, if I only had that to do over again!*" Regret is hell. Hell is human regret consolidated.

Today, I am not here to stir up old memories of regret. Last Sunday we had communion and we bring our regrets to the Table. What I am saying to you is, today is a gift that God has given you.

Today you can make choices.

* You can make a choice today to say to your spouse, *I love you*.

* You have the choice today to say to your child,

I'm so proud to have a son or daughter like you. I would not have it no other way.

* Today you have choice to say to your mother, father, or sibling,

I'm so proud to be part of this family.

David couldn't say that one word son, while Absalom was living. What is that word that God is telling you to say today? If there is a word that needs to be said, say it. If there is a choice that needs to be made, make it. Now...today.

The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:

Resources:

Ortberg, John. Sermon: No Regrets. www.mppc.org

(The sermon relied heavily on Ortberg's Sermon, No Regrets.)