

You Are the Man: A Sermon on 2 Samuel 11-12
Creston Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
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Every two minutes in the United States, someone is sexually assaulted. According to that number, 3 people in the United States have been sexually assaulted since I came up to preach. 3 people...Now 4: These are mothers, daughters, brothers, best friends, neighbors, co-workers, Sunday school teachers: 4 people. By the time I sit down: maybe 10, maybe 15, maybe 20, maybe more.

Or maybe that number will be much less. Maybe that number will be much less because from 10am to 11am this morning, so many abusers are occupied sitting in church pews like ours across this country.

I have heard it said: that not having a victim of abuse in your congregation would be a miracle. I am sad to say that there has been no such miracle at Creston Church. There are victims and survivors in our little church.

I was at a conference last week hosted by Safe Haven Ministries: an excellent Christian resource for victims in our community. They talked about domestic abuse, a close cousin to sexual assault. They talked about how domestic abuse is more than just black eyes. Domestic abuse is a pattern of behavior where one person, who is usually, but not always, a man, one person attempts to control and dominate another person in an intimate relationship. It can be violent: hitting, punching, slapping; it can be verbal or emotional: mocking your wife; humiliating her in front of friends; threatening your girlfriend if you don't like what she does. criticizing her constantly.

The experts say that domestic abuse and sexual assault are not first crimes of sex. They are first crimes of power. They are about one person exploiting a power imbalance to make themselves feel stronger at the expense of the victim.

An abuser needs to feel like their control is complete. An abuser needs to feel like the victim is completely dependent on him. That she is nothing without him.

There is something about this violence, something about these crimes, that seems to us far worse than robbery and extortion, far worse, even than murder.

When an abuser is successful, the victim must live with a loss to her dignity and humanity. This is a kind of death that the victim lives with every day.

Several times this week, I wondered if I should even talk about all this unpleasantness. After all, this is a can of worms to open on a Sunday morning. On Friday, it was pretty bad. I called a friend who works with victims and survivors and I told her what I intended to say: and I said, I think it may be too dangerous to go there, I'm afraid. And she told me, Sean, God's word is never safe. It is always risky to preach God's word. It is always risky to speak the truth.

And so it is that I could have preached on lots of topics. I could have introduced this story in many ways. I could downplay the rough edges.

I know that this brings up painful memories for many of you, and I'm sorry about that. I know that it raises fear for many others, and I'm very sorry about that, too. But I believe it is necessary to talk about all this unpleasantness because it is real. It is real for our church. It is real for our community. It is real for me. We talk about it because it is real and we talk about it because

the Bible talks about it. In fact, the very hero of our sermon series, King David, is, unmistakably and without a doubt: an abuser. He is, without question, guilty of sexual assault.

King David is a rapist.

Look at the story and it is plain to see.

David, a married man, spies a woman from his rooftop. And she is beautiful. And so David does what Kings do, he sends someone. He sends someone to see who she is.

You'll notice throughout this story, David doesn't do things himself. He sends others to do them. That's because he is the manager. He is in control. He is the king—he has all the power. So David sends someone to find out about this woman, and hears back that her name is dangerously hyphenated: she is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

But David is undeterred by her marital status. Or his own. And so he sends for her.

And you must realize that when the king sends for someone. They always come.

And so she came. And the text says he slept with her and then she went back home.

Some will say, "Oh, David was surely a handsome man. A war hero. A poet. Even religious. What woman could resist his charm?"

Well, then you should know that the Hebrew text says literally, he sent messengers for her and he took her: *he took her*. It is the same word for plucking a grape from a vine, same word for taking the life of your enemy on the battlefield. He sent messengers for her and he took her. Like a vintner tending his vine, David plucked Bathsheba from her home.

Remember, sexual assault is not first a crime of sex, it is first a crime of power. It is a crime where someone uses an imbalance of power to control another person. David's crime is textbook sexual assault. He uses his power to control another person. If you think that she could have said, "no." If you think she could have said "no" to his advances, you badly misunderstand the ways of Kings and their courts.

He sent messengers for her and he took her.

But someone will say, Can't blame David, after all, she was the one flaunting her body in plain view.

I am afraid I have little patience for such an argument: Though it is an argument often used to excuse or absolve an abuser. You shift the blame from the person to his libido, from the abuser to the victim. She was wearing attractive clothing. She was flirting. She led him on.

Of course, all of this misses the essential distinction: Sexual assault and domestic abuse are not first crimes of sex, they are first crimes of power. David has all the power. You'll notice that David never even speaks her name, in the entire two chapters. He never speaks her name. She is the woman, she is the wife of Uriah, or the daughter of Eliam, she is her and she is she, but she is never Bathsheba. To David, it would seem, she is not really a person.

This is a hard pill to swallow: Our King David. Hero of the Old Testament. Father of the line of Jesus Christ himself. King David: the abuser. King David: the rapist.

I suppose they didn't teach you that in Sunday school.

If you are scrambling in your mind to defend David. To excuse his behavior. Don't. It's a waste of time. His actions in the subsequent passages only reinforce his almost total power, his mastery of the levers of control. First, he tries to cover it up. He tries to deceive. He finally resorts to murder, a very complicated and premeditated murder. David's behavior is indefensible. He is the sender. He has the power.

And when you and I see what lengths David goes to protect himself, you can begin to despair. How far our hero has fallen. Can this situation ever be made right? How can the harm ever be addressed? These are hard questions.

These are the same hard questions that haunt survivors for months, for years, longer. Can this ever be made right? It feels hopeless. And for a long time in our passage, it feels hopeless. It only seems to be getting worse.

Until chapter 12. In chapter 12, the story turns. The story turns with one more sending. When we see the word again, we remember all of David's sending. But this is different. You see, for all of David's sending, for all of David's power, there is an authority that is higher, there is a power that is greater: **God** sends justice on behalf of the victim. God sends Nathan to confront David.

And sent by God, Nathan tells a story. A short and pithy story. A short and pithy story about a rich man, a poor man, and a little lamb. But Nathan's short and pithy story packs a punch. It is a damning story. And David is the one who is damned.

"The man must die," says David when he hears the story, "the man must pay for what he has done."

David's death sentence hangs in the air... the man must die, the man must pay they echo through the halls of David's palace, until Nathan catches them and says, David, You are the man.

David needed to see. That his offense was not an offense in the abstract. His offense was sin. Sin against Uriah, yes. Sin against Bathsheba, no question. And finally, his sin was a sin against God.

Sin affects people. Abuse affects people. And God cares about that. God cares completely about justice. And God cares completely about victims. And because God cares: David's abuse of Bathsheba becomes an abuse of God himself. God feels that pain.

Sin is never an offense in general. It is always an offense in particular.

This is why politicians are so infuriating. Politicians resort to the passive tense: "Things happened, words were said, someone was hurt." It is never "I said this;" It is never "I hurt her". Always passive.

And our politicians' lies are only a reflection of our own deceit. We tell our wife, "Something happened." We tell our co-worker, "Her request was forgotten." We tell the victim, "someone was abused."

But people are not just abused, and people are not just forgotten.

Someone abused him. Someone forget her.

If you want to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ—you must understand that sin is never an offense in general. It is always an offense in particular. Every time you hurt someone, every time you put yourself ahead of God—and it happens all the time—every time you sin, it is a sin against God.

This is what David, the rapist, realized—in addition to wronging Bathsheba and Uriah; David wronged God. And that is the sharpest blade.

People of God, if your blood begins boils when hear of David's abuse and Bathsheba's pain—that's good. Your blood is supposed to boil. David is the scum of the earth.

But if your blood begins to boil when you hear of David's abuse and Bathsheba's pain, then you need to know that God experiences your sins against other people, as sins against him. Your abuse of another person is abuse of God.

He created us for justice, and we swim in hypocrisy. He created us for generosity, and we wallow in stinginess. He created us for love, and we live for apathy.

These are not offenses in general. These are offenses in particular.

If you want to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, you must understand that in God's eyes your behavior is as indefensible as David's. Some of our sins are criminal—some of us are abusers, some of us are wife-beaters--for these crimes we deserve the full force of the law. Some of our sins are perfectly legal: you look up pornography, you gossip about your co-worker, you withhold your love from a friend who needs you.

Sin is never an offense in general, it is always an offense in particular.

And People of God, that is why the gospel of Jesus Christ is never a gospel in general, it is always a gospel in specific.

God didn't come to this world to forgive some people, generally.

God came into the world to save sinners, the apostle Paul says, Christ came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.

And you say, really, Paul? Worse than David, the rapist king?

Paul says, I am the worst.

In college, I was introduced to a song by a musician named Sufjan Stevens. In the song, Stevens describes the crimes of the serial killer and pedophile John Wayne Gacy. Perhaps the most detestable and disgusting criminals most could even imagine. And yet Gacy was real and his victims were real. Stevens ends the song with words that will chill you to the bone. They are words that haunt me still.

He writes, "and in my best behavior, I am really just like him. Look underneath the floorboards for the secrets I have hid."

I can promise you that you will never understand the gospel of Jesus Christ if you do not hear the words echoing in the room: "You are the man."

Mark, "You are the man." Rachael, "You are the man." Joel, "You are the man."

But if you are the man, if you have hurt others. if you have abused God. then this is the scandal of the gospel, if you are the man, then the gospel of Jesus Christ is written for you.

If you are the man, then the blood of Jesus was shed for you.

God didn't die for polite and put-together saints. He died for the scum of the earth. He died for me. He died for you. He died for Bathsheba.

He died for David.

Friends in Jesus Christ, if you are the man, then you are the one whom God can forgive.

If you are the man, then you are the one whom God can heal.