

Topic- God's Commitment to His Household

This is a story about a pastor who newly takes charge of a church and was keen on finding out the feedback for his sermons. He preaches his first sermon and he overhears people talking to each other, "he seems to be a great preacher! He has such great oratory skills". The pastor thinks to himself, "Ok! I need to work on my sermon!". He preaches his second sermon and overhears people praising his illustrations and he was like "I need to do better". He preaches the third sermon and people started to discuss among themselves, "Oh! What a wonderful saviour we have". And that brought satisfaction to the pastor that he is on the right track!

I believe it is utmost important for us to be part of a healthy church. Probably, some of us are still searching to be part of a healthy church. And this is perfectly fine because it is important to be part of a church that loves God and loves one another. A church that is faithful to the Gospel and is relevant to the needs of the community. But the truth is that it is not very simple. There are multiple nuances we think about when we are part of any church. One thing for sure is that we have the highest expectation from the church. It is almost always difficult to swallow if the church falls short of the moral standards or acts out injustices or demonstrates any kind of failure. And rightly so! We shouldn't be normalising any such behaviour in the church. More so, in our own personal lives, in our families, in our relationships or in our communities!

Last Sunday Darryl warned us to never underestimate the power of sin. Sin is deadly; sin is catastrophic; sin is death.

Having said that none of us are immune from sin- for all of us have fallen shorter of the glory of God. No church is immune from sin. That begs the question- How is then church different from the rest of the world? Aren't we supposed to be good and holy being better than the rest of the world? Why should I keep attending the church when it seems to be messy like any other institution? How can the church fall when we know the truth? (Although right knowledge does not always guarantee right action). I remember being part of a conversation where someone shared a bad experience in the church and someone goes, "I do not expect that from the church! Others, I understand! Have you been part of such conversations?"

We are quite often in a pursuit of a perfect church. Don't get me wrong; like I mentioned earlier, it is important to be part of a healthy church. The word or concept "healthy" assumes a state of process where there is intentionality, work, following a guideline or failure. On the other hand, the word "perfect" indicates a state of completion where perfection is attained. There is a humor where someone asks, hey where can I find the perfect church. To which someone answered- "Don't join it, the moment you join, it becomes imperfect". The church is an assembly of sinners saved by grace who are committed to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit". This implies that the church is filled with the sinners and it is filled with the work of the Holy Spirit.

How does that look like? How do we make sense of God when really bad things happen at church?

Today, we continue to take a look at the life of David. We have been studying the story of the Bible from the beginning of this year and we continue to see how God redeems the humanity to Himself while being committed to his people. One of the ways God is committed to His people is through His covenant.

A couple of Sundays ago we looked at 2 Samuel 7 where God makes a covenant with David by promising that David's house and kingdom that will be established forever. The scripture portion that we read today which is described as the last words of David. They are not technically last words of David before he died but they are last words in the sense of David's last significant words where David caps off with a poem that reflects his life. Let us take a deeper look at it today while we make sense of the church in terms of an assembly of sinners saved by grace. We will also take a look at this passage within the events that happened between 2 Samuel 13-23. The goal is to see God's commitment to the house of David in order to understand God's commitment to his church today.

The House Belongs to the Lord

Let us look at 2 Samuel 23: 1-2. *These are the last words of David, the declaration of David the son of Jesse, and the declaration of the man exalted by the Most High, the anointed one of the God of Jacob and the darling of the songs of Israel. The Spirit of Yahweh speaks through me, and his word is upon my tongue.*

During this series of the "story of the Bible", we saw David in his varied positions and situations. We saw him as a young shepherd boy, as a warrior, as a king; we saw him in

his highs; we saw him in his lows both emotionally and morally. We saw him being a mighty warrior hunting giants down; we saw him as a poet who beautifully pens down his emotions. One constant in all of this is that he knew his God. He had an intimate relationship with God and his heartbeat always cried out God. The biblical passage that we read today is no different. He highlights three aspects of God based on his relationship with God.

#1 It is God who exalts

These are the words of David, “*the declaration of David the Son of Jesse, and the declaration of the man exalted by the Most High*”. David after 40 years of being a king of Israel, he describes his identity as “the son of Jesse” and “the man exalted by the Most High”. He expresses his humble beginning, he was not born in a royal family, he is not from the tribe of Benjamin where the royal family belongs. David knew his humble beginnings. He knew his identity is purely derived from God. Paul prays for the church in Ephesus in Ephesians in Chapter 3:14 & 15 saying. *For this reason I kneel before the father from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name*. Our identity as an individual and as a church is surely purely God given and it is He who places us in a particular role or in a particular situation. Nothing in our life is a result of human accident but it is the result of God’s sovereign will and purpose.

#2 It is God who anoints

David exclaims that he is the anointed one of Israel by the God of Jacob. He believes that he is appointed by God to take care of Israel. Interestingly, he provides a dual role that he has for his nation. First, he is the king which is described as an anointed one. Which means that he is the one who performs on behalf of God in taking care of his nation. Second, he is the sweet singer of the Israel. He takes his role as a singer very seriously and states it along with his kingly responsibilities. It is God who anoints! It is God who places people in leadership and responsibilities. He anoints them and places them for a purpose. God has anointed you and placed you with responsibilities in church and outside for a purpose.

#3 It is God who speaks

What does David mean by that? He means that he is the king but on God's commands. It is almost like a soccer team coach and captain (if at all an ideal situation exists). The captain is the leader of the team but the coach has a higher influence. David knew who his authority was. He knew that he needs to submit to the authority. In fact the Hebrew understanding of the verb, "he speaks" corresponds to the authority of a creator. David knew who his ultimate boss is.

When we try to understand God's relationship with the church, church's relationship with God and church's relationship with the world, we need to get one thing straight. The church belongs to God. We belong to God. We do not lean on our own understanding, we do not let the latest trend dictate or we do not rely on human wisdom. We belong to God

and He speaks, we listen. As simple as that. Any authority we hold in the church, any role we play, any influence that we create; God speaks and we listen because we belong to God. It is God who anoints or as the New Testament puts it, it is Christ who is the head of the church. We are the body who derives our identity and life from God. The house of God belongs to God. In all that we do in the church, we need to pay careful attention of who is doing the talking. God speaks and we listen!

It sounds easy isn't it! But is it? Maybe not! for the very reason of the kind of culture that we find ourselves in. The culture informs us that we have the power to create the narrative that suits our taste. There is no listening! We speak, we form, we create! It is all about us.

The Bible reorients our life towards God saying- God speaks and we listen! Because the house belongs to the Lord.

The House is Subjected to Higher Standards

The second aspect that David highlights is the righteous ruling of the king. The Hebrew understanding of righteous ruling includes truth and justice. This ruling of truth and justice is a response to what God speaks to the king. We do see in the scriptures that David pursues truth and justice in his kingly responsibilities. In fact David was distinguished one of those kings in history where regular people had easy access to the king's court. For David, right always mattered because God mattered for him. Having said that, we also saw that David terribly fails. He fails to pursue truth and justice.

Instead, he gives into adultery. He commits murder for his own benefit. Even though he repents, Bible talks about the judgement that was brought on to him and his household. That is why sin is such a bad thing. It is contagious, the consequences of it is felt by not only self but also people who are related to us.

When we read chapters 13-20, there is a complete chaos in David's household. To begin with, his son Amnon schemes and rapes his half-sister Tamar which ruins Tamar's life. Tamar was the only princess in the entire royal household. Post this horrific event, she lived as a desolate woman by losing her dignity. Dignity for rape victims was a foreign concept in those days. In a nutshell, Amnon destroyed Tamar because of lust. Lust is very dangerous. That is why Jesus qualifies lust as adultery by just having lustful intentions. Amnon's lust leads him to do a heinous crime and destroy the life of a Royal princess. What is more baffling is David's response to this horrific situation. He gets very angry but does nothing.

Here is a king who leads his nation in righteousness and justice but does not discipline Amnon when he commits such a heinous crime. Dear church, this is a very important principle. God does not tolerate our sins. He definitely forgives us but does not tolerate and both are not the same things as you would know. Sins always have consequences but God in his nature forgives us and that is not tolerance.

Let me explain that- when you struggle to forgive somebody, there is a sense of detachment you feel with the person whom you experiencing the tension with. You are experiencing that because of several reasons. Either it is the anger or the feeling of

betrayal or feeling of lack of fairness or something else. So, in this case, you did not tolerate that person's action, hence you are feeling the relevant emotion. At this stage, even if the person comes to you seeking genuine forgiveness, the sense of detachment doesn't allow you to forgive the other person. God, on the other hand, forgiveness lies in his nature. When we wrong God, we anger God because in our sin we rebel against God. So, he disciplines us and sometimes punishes us because he doesn't tolerate what we did. But he has never stopped forgiving us. He is always loving and waiting for our repented heart.

God forgives our sins but does not tolerate them. We shouldn't be either. We should never bury any sin under the carpet and let it slide. We should always call out and sin needs to be dealt. That is why church discipline is a significant part of a healthy church. Bible commands the elders of the church to address the sin and discipline the members who defile the covenant of church membership by committing sins against God and others. David tolerated the sin committed by Amnon and that snowballed into something worse. Absalom, who was Tamar's sister plotted and killed Amnon. When David came to know about this, he was angry with Absalom which brought in tension between David and Absalom. The tension grew so bad that Absalom wanted to topple his father's throne and become the King of Israel. David had to flee for his life and Absalom started chasing him which resulted in a war between between the soldiers of David and Absalom. Eventually, Absalom was killed. So much chaos, so much blood in the royal household.

Remember, this is the same household with whom God makes a covenant through David for an everlasting kingdom. But what do we see? We see chaos, we see bloodshed, we see rebellion, we see the royal family crumbling down. The reason of this downfall is sin. Sin against God and sin against people.

God calls His household towards a higher calling. His standards are pure and are of the highest order. God summons us to a life of righteousness in pursuing truth and justice.

But the truth is that we are prone to fail, we battle with sin everyday, we are in a need of the saviour.

That is why the message of the Gospel applies to everybody. The people who do not believe in God, people who commit heinous crimes. People who are believers of the Gospel, people who attend church regularly. We are all in need of a saviour for the simple reason that we are sinners by nature.

But here is the Good News;

The House is Secure in God's covenant

Take a look at vs. 5 in Chapter 23 of 2nd Samuel- David sings, *Yet not so is my house with God, for he made an everlasting covenant for me, arranging everything. He has secured all my deliverance, and all my desire he will cause to happen.*

David shows his immense confidence in God and his covenant. In Matthew 7, Jesus tells a parable about the builders who built two houses where one was built on the rock and the other was built on the sand. The rain came down, the stream rose and winds blew

against the house. The house that had its foundation on the rock survived and the house that had sand as its foundation on the sand did not.

The foundation matters the most. David knew that the foundation of his house was God. It is God who made the covenant with him. And he knew that he was secure.

What does it mean to be secured in God's covenant?

The word "covenant" is very special for the people in Biblical times. It is generally an agreement between two nations. Mostly, it is between a powerful nation and a vassal state. The covenant indicates a protection of the vassal state within the sovereign reign of the powerful nation. This covenant signifies a number of things for this vassal state. It is a symbol of protection, security, subjection and sub-ordination. Well, it purely depends on the powerful nation on the nature of subjection. However, the vassal state knows that it is protected from the other big players. They are safe and secure under the covenant.

David believes that he is safe and secure because God made covenant with him and his house.

What does it mean for us today? Are we secured with God? Is our salvation secured? The Bible reminds us that it is God who has made the covenant with us. It is God who chose us and made us his own. Our salvation does not rely on our good conducts or good works or being religious. It is purely by God's grace that is showered upon us. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, *for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not by works, so that no one can boast.*

It is all God! It is His doing. We stay away from sin not so that we score brownie points to be part of his covenant or receive the gift of salvation. But we do stay away from sin because we are already part of his covenant and we have received the gift of salvation. We may ask- its not fair! David and his family committed so many wrong things. How do they get to be secured in God's covenant? Romans 3:10 says *there is no one without sin.* *None!* We are by nature sinners. We do not become sinners by committing sin. We commit sin because we are sinners. That is why we are in need of a saviour. And God is committed in saving us. He has reached out to us, he loves us, he forgives us and he made us his own.

The house of David did not have the best representation in the history. But God was committed to the house. Centuries after God's covenant with David, Jesus Christ, the eternal king was born in the house of David. His kingdom is eternal; the covenant is everlasting.

God is committed to His House! God is committed to us.

Let us revisit the question I asked earlier- How do we make sense of God when really bad things happen at church?

This is what we saw today;

First- The church belongs to God. God speaks, we listen. Second, We are called to listen to God and his standards are of the highest value. The fact is we are an assembly of sinners saved by grace. This means that we are prone to fail and we are prone to sin. This

also means that we are in a dire need of a saviour. The very fact that we recognise that we need a saviour makes us a healthy church and not a perfect church. Third- God has made a covenant with this healthy church who is in need of a saviour. Because perfect church doesn't need of saviour.

The good news is that we are secured in God's covenant. We have a God who is committed in saving us. He is so committed that He gave his life for us so much so by taking up all the consequences of the sins that we have committed in the cross!

What a wonderful saviour we have!

Let us pray!