

Men Behaving Badly

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading is Genesis chapter 38. That's on page 42 of our Bibles. Genesis chapter 38.

At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hira.

There, Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and made love to her, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son who was named Er. She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. It was at Kezib she gave birth to him. Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight, so the Lord put him to death.

Then Judah said to Onan, sleep with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother. But Onan knew that the child would not be his. So whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to avoid providing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight, so the Lord put him to death also. Judah then said to his daughter-in-law, Tamar, live as a widow in your father's household until my son Shelah grows up. For he thought he may die too, just like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father's household. After a long time, Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hira, the Adulamite, went with him. When Tamar was told your father-in-law was on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep, she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Aenim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, Come now, let me sleep with you. And what will you give me to sleep with you, she asked. I'll send you a young goat from my flock, he said. Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it, she asked? He said, What pledge should I give you? Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hands, she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. After she left, she took off the veil and put on her widow's clothes again.

Meanwhile, Judah sent the young goat by his friend, the Adullamite, in order to get his pledge back from the woman. But he did not find her. He asked the men who lived there, Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Aenim? There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here, they said.

[4 : 1 4] So he went back to Judah and said, I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here. Then Judah said, Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her.

About three months later, Judah was told, Your daughter-in-law, Tamar, is guilty of prostitution, and as a result, she is now pregnant. Judah said, Bring her out and let her be burned to death.

As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. I am pregnant by the man who owns these, she said. And she added, See if you recognize those seal and cords and staff these are.

Judah recognized them and said, She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son, Shiloh. And he did not sleep with her again. When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand.

So the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, This one came out first. But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, This is how you have broken out.

[5 : 55] And he was named Peres. Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out, and he was named Zerah. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thanks, Alan, for reading. If you could keep your Bible open on page 42 of the Church Bibles, Genesis 38, that would be a great help. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you'd find that helpful as we come to this chapter. Last week, we started with a clip, as we looked at Genesis 37, from the musical, Joseph and his amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

But the scenes this week, they didn't make the cut in the musical. There's no song about this bit. What a mess. But we're a church committed to teaching the whole Bible, to let God set the agenda for us.

And what I hope we'll find is that we see God's goodness not far under the surface, as we get into the detail here, amidst the carnage. So let's pray. Let's ask for God's help again.

Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we trust you that the unfolding of your word gives light. It imparts understanding to the simple. So that we ask that you will open our ears to hear your voice.

[7 : 18] You will open our minds to understand, and you'll open our hearts to respond rightly to you. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder what you think when you see that Christians get caught in bad behavior.

When I was a young adult, I went to a summer camp called Soul Survivor, which was many thousands of young Christians went to Soul Survivor year after year. And in the last fortnight, the pioneer and leader of that ministry has had to step back while there are complaints and allegations about his behavior being looked into.

Now, we don't know yet. He might be vindicated. It may be that there's nothing in that. But already, in him stepping back, I've heard people saying how confused and discouraged they feel, especially people who benefited from that ministry, was God really at work through that?

How do we make sense of that? And at the same time, all of us will experience firsthand in our own lives Christians around us behaving badly. If we're not expecting that, we won't last long in a church, in a church family.

There's no shortage of people who walk away from church community and even tragically walk away from Jesus because they're so disappointed by Christian people and how they're treated.

[8 : 44] And again, we might ask, well, is God really at work there? Does God really have the power to build his church when his people make such a mess of the Christian life? Well, we're in a series looking at the family who became the Israelites, the Old Testament people of God, the nation of Israel.

So in a real sense, this family that we're looking at here, Jacob's sons, they are the church in their generation. They are the people of God in the world at that time, the church.

And their father, Jacob, was the grandson of Abraham who received the promises from God that through his offspring, God will establish his kingdom, God's people who will live in God's place.

Kings will come from his line, Genesis 17. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through the offspring of Abraham. So now we're a couple of generations on looking at the sons of Jacob.

And last week we heard that Jacob had a favorite son, which is not good. And it was Judah, the fourth oldest, who had the idea of selling Jacob into slavery.

[9 : 50] So he's literally been carted off to Egypt. And this morning we're hearing what happens next in the life of that son, Judah. So our first point this morning is Tamar is in need and Judah's diabolical behavior.

The warning signs are already there in verse 1. At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adah named Hirar. By now, Judah is our next hope for this family, Jacob's family, because what we've already seen in Genesis, if you've read it, is that Reuben, the eldest, who's meant to be the kind of leader, the eldest son, has slept with one of his father's concubines.

And then the next two sons, Simeon and Levi, went on a killing rampage in vengeance. So when we look at Judah, we're hoping for something better, but we're not optimistic.

Last week he sold his brother, and now he's bogged off with his mate Hirar. And Hirar is an absolute lad. You can see it in the chapter. I think this is the ancient Near Eastern equivalent of Judah leaving a Christian home to go to Magaluf or Benidorm, out with the lads on the lash.

And it gets worse in verse 2. There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shuar. He married her and made love to her. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son who was named Ur.

[11 : 16] So now Judah is completely offside. He's marrying a Canaanite. So believers marrying unbelievers. God's against that. Not because the unbeliever, the Canaanite, is any worse, but for the danger that the Canaanites, who are idolaters, that the unbelieving spouse, the idolatrous spouse, will lure the heart of the believer away from God.

They have three sons. And sometime later, in verse 6, we learn that Judah got a wife for Ur and her name was Tamar, presumably also a Canaanite.

And things have got so bad in this family that God, highly unusually, we don't see this often at all in the Bible, he brings forward his just judgment of sin on Ur, in verse 7.

But Ur, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight. So the Lord put him to death. And here we need to remember that in this ancient culture, for a widow to be deprived of her husband and children meant she lost everything.

She lost all cultural capital. There's no welfare state. Men had all the economic power because they worked with the livestock in the fields. They probably own all the property at that time in Canaan.

[12 : 39] So there's no security for Tamar. She's highly vulnerable now. A woman in that ancient, chaotic culture, without a husband, without children.

And we don't know how much of God's Old Testament law was already revealed in some way to this family. But verse 8 makes clear that Judah knew that it was the moral duty of the family to provide one of his other sons to marry Tamar.

It becomes known later as the Leveret law, Leveret marriage, once the law of Moses is established in Egypt, that when a woman's husband died, before they had children, and there was an unmarried brother, it was the duty of that brother to marry the widow, to provide for her, and also in hope that they could provide offspring who would be the heir of the eldest son who had died.

If you were with us last August when we went through the book of Ruth, that's what Boaz does for Ruth. He's the kinsman redeemer who marries the widow to provide offspring.

So Judah tells Onan, the next son, to crack on and fulfill that duty. But Onan is having none of it. We don't know whether it's because he hates his brother who's died or he realizes if they have a child that that child will get a double portion of his father's inheritance.

[14:02] We don't know why, but he doesn't want a child with Tamar. So in verse 9, he makes sure that she can't get pregnant when they come together. The point is, here are men with power refusing to look after a widow.

A young widow who was married into their family. And we read verse 10. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight, so the Lord put him to death also.

Then Judah seems to think that it's all Tamar's fault. So instead of looking after her among the family of God, he sends her packing. Verse 11, He says, live as a widow in your father's household until my son Shelah grows up.

For he thought he may die too, just like his brothers. And time goes by, years go by, Judah's own wife dies, and it's clear that he's got no intention of giving Shelah to Tamar.

So Tamar is forgotten. She's cut off from the people of God, and she's cut off from the promises of God. And it's grotty. And we're left thinking, this family deserves God to judge them and start again with a different family.

[15:17] And this is the family from which we know we need descendants for God to keep his promises. God has promised to bless the world through the offspring of Abraham.

In Genesis terms, we've been waiting since Genesis chapter 3, when sin first entered the world, for a saviour to be born, for God has promised that one day a son will be born to a woman who will destroy evil forever.

The serpent crusher will come. So that when a baby is born in Jacob's line, Jacob's family, we're thinking, could this be the one? But now Judah doesn't have any grandchildren.

His family is just a bunch of blokes living in Canaan, living as badly as everyone around them. And if we'd heard God's promises through encounters with that family, and our experience of God's people was these people, I reckon we would struggle not to give up on the God of the Bible.

So let's pick up the story with Tamar's response. Our second point, Tamar makes a plan and Judah's hypocritical one-night stand. We know things are ominous when Herar, the lad, appears again in verse 12.

[16:34] Halfway through, when Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Herar, the Adammite, went with him.

Well, that's going to go badly. So in verse 13, Tamar hatches a plan, partly because she has nothing. She's got nothing left. And she's trying to get from Judah what he has wrongly refused to give her.

So she hears that Judah's back on the rampage, and look at verse 14. She took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enim, which is on the road to Timnah.

And the writer, I think, wants us to have some sympathy for her here, because it says next, for she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

And Judah thinks she's a prostitute, and he asks to pay her for sex. Tamar sets none of the terms. She just puts on a veil, and she just asks him two questions.

[17 : 43] Judah is the one with all the power. He's the one in control. He offers her a young goat, which he doesn't have with him. So he offers her his seal and its cord, which he would have had around his neck, which was there as a personal, unique inscription of who he is, and his staff.

They're both symbols of his status. And it speaks volumes, doesn't it, about the kind of man Judah is, that Tamar knew all she would have to do is go out where Judah is passing by with a veil on, and he would ask her for sex.

Judah looks like the ancient equivalent of Andrew Tate, the self-styled king of toxic masculinity. And all through the Old Testament, God calls on his people to care especially for the needy, especially for widows, orphans, and foreigners in their midst.

When people do that, we reflect the character of God. So if this staff and seal were symbols of a man's substance, of his position and power, God calls men to use their power with bravery and sacrifice to protect and provide for women like Tamar.

And instead, here is Judah carelessly leaving his staff and seal with a woman he thinks is a prostitute. He'll never know her name for what he can get from her.

[19 : 15] How is anyone going to redeem this situation? That's what we're to think. It's got so bad. How could anyone redeem it? And then we come to our third point.

Tamar returns his staff and Judah's remarkable confession. So Judah sends his mate Herar, his fixer, to find Tamar with the goat and get his stuff back.

He's a bit like a bloat wandering around the day after a stag do, trying to sort of pay off the credit card bills wherever the lads have been. So he asks around and he can't find her and he asks around in the neighborhood and the men who live there say, well, there hasn't been a shrine prostitute here.

So at this point, he can't get the stuff back and in verse 23, a bit of self-consciousness creeps in. Then Judah said, let her keep what she has or we will become a laughing stock.

After all, I did send her this young goat but you didn't find her. Isn't that extraordinary? Judah here clearly still believes in right and wrong. He's kind of still justifying himself for not making the payment.

[20 : 22] Leave it now. I've tried to pay the woman. That's how self-righteousness works. It's often in our own lives as well that we overlook our own faults and we're still trying to justify ourselves.

And Judah's concern here is about his reputation as more and more people say, look, there's that bloke again with the goat looking to pay that prostitute. What's going on? And then in verse 24, three months later, he hears that Tamar is guilty of prostitution and she's pregnant from it.

And look at verse 24. his response to hearing that news. Judah said, bring her out and let her be burned to death.

It's merciless, it's brutal, it's disproportionate and so blind to his own behavior. His own failure to look after his daughter-in-law for years.

And what's going on with the prostitution? Does he have a different rule for men than for women about that? But God is going to use what Judah says there to bring a devastating conviction in Judah's life of his own sin.

[21 : 36] So imagine the drama of verse 25 that they've already prepared the fuel for the fire to burn Tamar. She spent her last night of her life locked away because it's on the very morning, verse 25, as she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law.

I am pregnant by the man who owns these, she said. And she added, see if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are. Verse 26, Judah recognized them and said, she is more righteous than I since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.

It doesn't sound like much but this is the turning point in Judah's life. The public confession of a deep personal conviction of sin.

She is more righteous than I am. He's already declared that she deserves judgment in his view and now he's owning that his behavior is actually much worse than hers.

All he can do now is reflect with God's help on the mess that he's made and seek God's forgiveness and power to change.

[22 : 55] And folks, that's the best place that he can be. He's woken up to the reality that he is worse than the people he looks down on. All moral self-righteousness has gone and it means that he can just come to God like the tax collector Jesus tells about when he speaks about the religious leader the Pharisee and the tax collector who come to God and the Pharisee is in the temple and he's thanking God that he's not like other people but the tax collector beats his breast and says Lord have mercy on me a sinner and Jesus says it's the tax collector who went home justified.

So that today for us like Judah the start of spiritual transformation is a deep personal conviction of sin when you realize I'm worse than the people I look down on.

I was made to love like God loves to love God and love my neighbor with other person centered love and I've fallen badly short I'm devastatingly broken and God's seen it all so that the only thing I could ever contribute to my right standing before God is the sin that I bring from which he has to redeem me.

That's Judah's she is more righteous than I and it really is the turning point in this man's life by the time we get to chapter 49 the penultimate chapter of Genesis Jacob will bless his sons gathered around him as his very last act and he promises that great kings will come from the line of Judah.

We saw a scepter yesterday handed to King Charles at his coronation why is it a scepter? Because when Jacob blesses Judah he says the scepter will never depart from you.

[24 : 47] In other words God's forever king the Messiah the serpent crusher he will come in your line so that when the angel introduces John as we've already sung this morning when the angel introduces the apostle John in Revelation to Jesus on the throne of heaven he says behold the lion of the tribe of Judah.

How does Judah go from being this terrible mess of a man to the one through whom God will bring his royal line of David and Christ Jesus?

Well it starts with this turning point of conviction of his sin. In chapter 37 he sold Joseph his brother and brought grief to his father.

In chapter 44 Judah and his brothers will go to Egypt where Joseph is now prime minister and Joseph will play a trick on them to test them to see if they've changed over the years while he's been gone.

He entraps Benjamin his brother and he imprisons Benjamin and says to the other brothers go back to your father with the silver that you brought for the grain take your silver and I will imprison Benjamin for his crime and Judah is the one who steps forward and says let me take my brother's place punish me for his wrongdoing because I can't bear to see my father's misery if we don't bring him back and as he does that as he asks to take the place of his brother so his brother can go free he foreshadows the line of Judah who will come in his line who will go to the cross so that he can stand before our righteous judge and say let me bear their punishment so that they can go free and so then we see grace breaking through in this family at the end of the chapter our fourth point Tamar has a baby and God's unstoppable grace let's pick things up in verse 27 when the time came for her to give birth there were twin boys in her womb as with the twins

[26 : 56] Jacob and Esau that have already come in Genesis in the promise there's a struggle with these two and it's Perez the baby boy who breaks through and at the end of the book of Ruth in a couple of a few books time in the Bible we find that down the family line of Perez we get Boaz and then we get Jesse and then we get the great king David through Perez then David's royal line from Perez goes through 28 more generations to Joseph the husband of Mary the mother of Jesus so here is the baby who brings hope and a future for these people for God's promises and for God's world what does God teach us in choosing Tamar to be the mother of the promised line when we get to the family tree of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1 it lists men all through the generations and only four women are mentioned

Rahab Bathsheba Ruth and Tamar a woman who like those three others is a racial outsider a woman who who does behave wrongly here the ends don't justify the means in the Christian life why is Tamar given that place of honor by God well because here is a woman of great faith here is a woman mistreated by the men among God's people left powerless and yet she stays in her mourning clothes because she is committed to the family of God we don't know how much she would have heard in her marriage of the God of the Bible and the promises that he's made to this family that she's married into but her behavior though it's shady it is calculated to get what she should always have been given by rights by this family a son in the line of Judah and she is bringing herself back into God's family and from a human perspective we could say were it not for

Tamar's faith at this point and her cunning resolve we wouldn't have had the son in Judah's line through whom God will send the savior of the world so it's a horrible chapter full of spiritual failure but in Tamar we have this model of a woman who still has faith in the promises of God and as God gives her and Judah the baby Perez he shows us that his salvation is always all his grace and nothing in our past can thwart it Tamar was mistreated by men and there will be some here I know there are some here who have been mistreated by men could we be encouraged to see that just as for Tamar God has a place for you in his family and more than that he can greatly use you when you trust his promises Perez is the result of a one night stand when his dad paid for sex and there may be some here in a crowd of this size who know that we were the result of a one night stand what an encouragement to see that that is no barrier at all to the redeeming grace of God others of us can see from Judah this morning that God's power to keep his promises is big enough to overcome your sexual lust when like Judah we acknowledge that we have done wrong sexually and we come to him in repentance and faith and ask for his help his grace can overcome all of that and redeem us we have that program on TV don't we who do you think you are where celebrities come on and they find people from their ancestry and talk to them about it sometimes it's great stories sometimes it's more shady well picture Jesus on who do you think you are if that were possible and discovering this in his family line among his ancestors and the presenter relishing the chance the camera closing in for his reaction as they show him that for all his righteousness we know he never puts a foot wrong in his ancestors you've got a man as terribly disappointing as Judah and a woman as mistreated as Tamar resulting to this and picture Jesus saying

I know this already I know full well that people like this are in my family that's why I've come in compassion I've come to seek out the lost to find them and to save them in fact anyone like that anyone like this who comes to me knowing they're not righteous is welcome in my family I call them my brothers and sisters Judah had all the power with Tamar and when he called for Tamar to be taken out and burnt he was asking for her to be punished for his sin but the true and better Judah who's coming the Lord Jesus comes so that he can be taken out of the city and lifted up on the cross so that he can be punished for our sin and we will see the name of Judah forever in the new creation it's going to be written on the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21 his mess stands as a witness to God's grace that even the worst of sinners can have a future with God if we have faith in his promises thanks to his grace let's pray together mighty God and loving heavenly father whose son the Lord Jesus died so that by his wounds we are healed we acknowledge before you our own need for grace our own spiritual ill health may your spirit help us grasp more deeply how we need the cross but also the power that you have displayed at the cross that we might grow in our appreciation of your grace your wisdom your patience and that we would trust firmly and joyfully your promises to us in Jesus thank you that you redeem and restore we thank you for sending

Jesus the lion of the tribe of Judah and we pray in his name Amen