

This chapter will surprise you. It surprised me.

In the past, what has stood out to me has been the bad behavior of Judah and the sexual misbehavior of Tamar.

But, actually, after reading this chapter a few times one begins to realize that God is not particularly upset about what Tamar does.

In fact, once you understand the culture, family, and Tamar's situation, what Tamar does is entirely understandable.

So, this story is going to mess with our moral sensitivities.

We are going to discover some of what God really cares about and what makes Him angry.

And, we are going to discover more about what kind of person God likes to use in His plans.

More than anything else, this chapter is about the failure of men to lead well... and what happens when they fail to lead well.

And, it is about how God uses these things in His sovereign plan of salvation.

In chapter 38, we continue the "records of the generations of Jacob" = what comes from Jacob

This is the story of Jacob's family.

In chapter 37 we learned of the selling of Joseph, the youngest son of Jacob (except for Benjamin).

So, before we follow the adventures of Joseph in Egypt, we get one last look at Jacob's family in Canaan.

Actually, we get a look into the family of one of his sons... the family of Judah.

And, why this family... well, we don't know yet in Genesis...

but we will close the message this morning with a look at why Jacob's family is especially important...

... and how this story fits into what God is doing.

I. The sins of Judah and his sons

vss. 1-23

Now the first reaction you might have to all this is "What a huge mess!" And, that would be a correct reaction. It is a mess.

But, why? The mess is a mess because of the sins of the men in the story. Let us look at these sins one at a time.

There are five:

1. Judah marries a Canaanite. He knew this was wrong from the tradition of his family. Abraham, Isaac, (Esau) Jacob... Men. Don't marry (or even date) a woman who does not love the Lord and follow him.
2. Er "was evil in the sight of the Lord." We don't know what he was doing, but we know he wasn't listening to God. Men, be students of what God says. Strategically build habits of obedience in your life.
3. Onan did not give Tamar children. In this culture, it was his responsibility for Tamar's social security. He would have sex with her but not give her children. Why? Because they would be considered his brother's children. They might cost money. Maybe he wanted to protect his other children that he didn't even have yet. Like the guy in Ruth.
4. Judah did not give his son, Shelah to Tamar. Why did Judah think God might kill Shelah? We don't know. Maybe Shelah was like his brothers. In any case, Judah was not being honest with Tamar (vs. 14)
5. Judah went into a temple prostitute (he thought). He was thinking of himself. He just wanted sex. But, (he thought) he was involving himself in idol worship, and union with someone who he was not married to. And, furthermore, what is he doing hanging out with his Canaanite buddy? That has done him no good. When you spend time with people who have a distorted view of sex (TV), you get a distorted view of sex.

Now, let us think for a minute. What sort of sins are these?

First, it is important to note that in the world of Judah and his sons, these were acceptable sins.

In other words, these kind of sins would be the kind of sins that people in those days would have said,

"Well that's just how people are. It is the way things usually go. They are just not that bad."

"After all, boys will be boys. Can God really expect anything else?"

"Can't Judah marry who he wants? Then when she dies... he has needs. Right?"

"And, these men are just protecting their own interests. Right?"

Well, that is just the point. These sins are all sins of selfishness.

These men are not thinking about what God wants them to do. They are not thinking about Tamar.

But we are going to discover that God is! God is very concerned about Tamar, and He expects these men to be as well.

God is always concerned about the weak and helpless, about the wives and children, about the widows and orphans.

This is what God is like. We saw it with Hagar in the wilderness in Genesis 16 and 21.

James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this:

to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

What are you like? Are you like God in this respect? And if you are a real man, He expects you to be.

This is not what the culture around us expects of us men.

No, men are expected to be interested in girls, in cars, in baseball and sports, in fishing and hunting, or in the TV.

We expect men to be obsessed with themselves and neglect their families. These are acceptable sins.

But they are not acceptable to God.

When you selfishly neglect your wife or your children or someone who needs your help...

because you want to do what you want to do... you make God angry.

When you protect your own interests at the expense of someone who needs your help... you make God angry.

This is why adopting children and loving them is so dear to God... He cares for those people. You should as well.

Alright, what happens with Tamar?

II. God's grace to righteous Tamar.

vss. 24-26

At first you might not think that this is about God's grace at all.

God is not mentioned in these three verses. Grace is not mentioned at all in this chapter.

Furthermore, to think of Tamar as "righteous" seems to be ridiculous.

Until you get to vs. 26 and the word of Judah makes it inescapable. "She is more righteous than I."

Well, you might reason, Judah is not very righteous at all, so he is not saying much.

But, that is to weaken the text and miss his point. He is calling her righteous because she did right when he did her wrong.

He demanded death by burning for her... which was excessive and not at all compassionate.

And, she used his sin to make him see that she had been neglected by him.

Now he understands. "I put her in this situation. She had no hope, no security, no future... What else could she do?"

You might say, "But she did sin, even if her sin was less than Jacob and his sons." Ok, maybe that's true.

But, God seems to be not interested in condemning her, but in showing her compassion and grace.

So, we should be as well to people in situations like hers... orphans and widows and desperate people.

Let me give you an personal example that has been very real to me.

Every now and then I meet someone who is barely getting by and making it by taking advantage of everything they can.

Now, I think it is a bad idea for a government to arrange social programs that actually encourage people to do this.

But, for a woman who has learned to get by by using every government program and church program...

and every nice person she meets to provide for herself and her family. Can you blame her?

I might not like it that she sees me as a rich person who can help her. But, I can understand her.

And, what does God want me to do? It's not hard to figure out. I am supposed to help her, not critique her.

Even more, the helping is going to be difficult, inconvenient. I may have to sacrifice some things.

I need to be wise, and even strategic... but to walk away is inexcusable.

Tamar has committed the sort of sin that "good people" tend to condemn. But she is called "righteous."

Judah and his sons commit sins that "good people" tend to justify. But, they suffer the anger and correction of God.

And, what does God do for Tamar? He gives her children, which is just what she wanted and needed. Twins even!

God blesses her with two boys! That's grace. She didn't deserve the gift. God gave. God cared for her.

God cared for her when the men in her life did not. This is what God is like.

This is an illustration of Rom. 5:20, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

So, Tamar's "righteous" act produces two heirs for Judah to replace the sons he has lost.

III. The advancing sovereign plan of God

vss. 27-30

No doubt this story of twins being born reminds us of Gen. 25 when Rebekah bore twins, Esau and Jacob, to Isaac.

And, just as then, the younger becomes the most significant in the plan of God.

Zerah, the "one [who] came out first," is marked with a scarlet thread... firstborn, red like Esau.

Perez, "what a breach you have made," actually supplants his brother.

Gen. 46:12 Notice that Perez is listed before Zerah... and of all the three living sons, only the sons of Perez are listed.

Apparently his family is important... but, we don't yet know why.

Ruth 4:12 Why is Perez picked out in this blessing? It is because Boaz is of the house of Perez.

and, God is obviously the one who blessed Perez with children and gave him offspring.

Ruth 4:18-22 So, Perez, Tamar's son, is the one from whom the king of Israel, David, will come.

And who comes from David?

Matt. 1:1-16 So, from Tamar comes the Messiah, Jesus Christ... through whom you and I are saved!

Have you ever wondered why, in the genealogy of Jesus we read of 5 women?

And who are these women?

Tamar, the woman who had twins by harlotry with her father-in-law.

Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute from Jericho who feared God.

Ruth, the widow from Moab who was rescued from poverty when Boaz married her.

Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah who David murdered before he took her as his wife after his sin of adultery.

Mary, the 16 year old virgin who was made pregnant by the Holy Spirit when she was not yet married?

What an unlikely assortment of women to be listed in the genealogy of Jesus. What can this mean?

God uses women in His sovereign plan... which we might take for granted today, but people needed to learn it 2,000 years ago.

Actually, we probably still need to learn it.

God uses every kind of person in every kind of situation to advance his plan of salvation...

even people about whom you might think, "No way, not her." People like Tamar.

God even uses sinful people and their sinful actions to advance His purposes.

So, men, don't overlook the women that God puts in your life. God certainly doesn't overlook them. He is working through them.

And, God is trying to teach you that He wants to work through you to be a blessing to them and a part of His plan.