

The corrupting power of sin & the more powerful grace of God

For Our Good 2: Genesis 38

“My 3” Card

About the Superbowl

So, there was a game last week. And we lost. And I stood here and told you not to worry about my end of a certain wager...because we wouldn't lose. Then we lost. And I believe in owning up to my end of a wager. And my wager is that I would deliver the main point of my sermon in the jingle used by Peyton Manning in the nationwide commercials. I'll be sure to give you warning.

Intro

Our story today proves that you cannot read the Bible as inspirational stories filled with moral examples for us to imitate. Which is what most people think the Bible is.

Judah is the son of Jacob and the great grandson of Abraham who God came to and said, “I’m going to save the world through your family. So I want you and your descendants to know me personally, walk in righteousness,

and pass the faith on to the next generation.” And Judah fails in every way so we’re not going to find any moral examples with him.

So then we move to Tamar. Is she your moral example? Is sexual entrapment and incest a good moral example? I don’t think I’ll be teaching my two daughters to follow Tamar’s example.

So what then is the theme of this story? In a way it’s the theme of all Bible stories. At the end of the story Tamar names one of her kids “Perez” and Perez means “breakthrough.” And here is the moral of all Bible stories: Morals will never save you. You will never be able to relate to God with good morals. The theme of today’s story and all bible stories is not so much here’s how you can live a moral life and get God to bless you but rather here’s how the grace of God “breaks through” into the lives of people who would otherwise sink under their brokenness and sin.

Here’s the big idea today:

First, Here is the way Budweiser loving tennessee bumpkin Denver QBs would say it: **Jesus overcomes your sin**

The gospel breaks through the destruction caused by your sin.

That's where we are going today. But to GET THERE...I gotta tell you the story of Genesis 38. And its another one of those stories with a lot of characters. Which means you gotta lock in with me...and really means you need to bring your bible to church so you can follow along.

[12] In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

- Judah was one of Joseph's older brothers. Remember he's the one that orchestrated Joseph being sold into slavery. Well, while Joseph is in Egypt, we get this one chapter glimpse into Judah's jerry springer life.
- First 11 verses go like this: Judah's oldest son's name is Er. Judah finds him a wife named Tamar. But Er is wicked. So God "put him to death." We don't know specifics. But the family inheritance was supposed to go to him.
- The law says the next oldest son must go into his dead brother's wife and give her children so brother's line can carry on. So Judah's son Onan goes in. If he doesn't he will get slapped by her with his own shoe in front of the elders.¹ I know, bible is awesome.
- So Onan sleeps with her, but...and this is the bible talking "wastes his semen on the ground so as not to give offspring to his brother." He deceives everyone.

¹ Deuteronomy 25.5-10. *The Bible is awesome.*

He appears to be religiously obedient, but is actually self-serving. And so in the next verse God kills Onan for this charade of obedience. Such a bizzare story that communicates such an important warning: Half-way obedience is wicked in the sight of the lord

- So, now 2 of Judah's sons are dead. With one common denominator: They both were married to this girl Tamar. Judah blames her instead of seeing what his sons had been doing. So, he says you go home to your parents (because my sons keep mysteriously dying when you are with them). When my 3rd son grows up (in 4-5 years likely), you can marry him.

That brings us to verse 13.

[13] And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," [14] she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.

- Judah's youngest son Shelah is grown up by now and Tamar hadn't been given to him. And one thing we know already, Judah cannot be trusted. Joseph's bloody coat from last week tells us that.

- So she changes out of her widow clothes and dresses up like a prostitute then goes and stands along the route she knows Judah will be traveling.
- So many things wrong with this. But her motive is that Tamar can't trust Judah. And because this family is more messed up than The Kardashians she naturally thinks sexual entrapment of her father-in-law is the best answer to her problems.

[15] When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. [16] He turned to her at the roadside and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.

Because that was what makes this wrong. The great grandson of Abraham.. Oh hey a prostitute, let me come in to you. Tamar must have known he had a propensity to buy the services of a prostitute. And before you think that's crazy, people in this zip code do the same thing. We are reading a story that very clearly and directly will apply to us today.

So he takes the bait...

She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" [17] He answered, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." And she said, "If you give me a pledge, until you send it—" [18] He said, "What pledge shall I give you?"

- She doesn't trust him! She's still waiting on the last thing Judah promised. Judah: "OH...I've got a goat back home I'll send you....Just put this on my tab, I'm good for it." But she doesn't want a goat. She wants

justice. And now she has him where she wants him... If you give me a pledge, some insurance that you will pay up, then we can make this happen.

She replied, "Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her...

- Ummmm...idiot. See what she convinces him to do? He hands his identification to a prostitute. This would be like "give me your driver's license, your phone, and that spray paint art shirt you had made in myrtle beach 10 years ago that says "Joe is Da Man." Nobody in their right mind would hand all this over to a prostitute.
- Here's a truth we are going to draw out later but you gotta see now: **Sexual Sin blinds you to its consequences**. He was giving her everything that could clearly identify him. His lust in the moment is consuming him. Whatever you want, I'll give it to you just have sex with me. He is acting like an addict. Which is what sexual sin does. It enslaved Judah and it will enslave you. This story is going to stand in stark contrast to how Joseph responds to Potiphar's wife next week. I don't think it is any accident that Genesis 38 & 39 are beside each other.

and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

- So...Judah has now slept with his daughter in law. Not great bro. Oh, and she's pregnant. Judah the schemer has now been schemed. And its about to fall on him like a ton of bricks.

- Verses 19 – 23 – Judah sends payment to the prostitute, but the prostitute can't be found. So he starts to get a little nervous.

[24] About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned."

- Judah's comment right there is two words in Hebrew "Take. Burn."
- This was a really severe punishment. It was legal, but virtually nobody went this far. Was only reserved for most heinous offenses. Why would Judah demand that? Because, if you remember, – Judah thought she was the reason her sons had died. Judah needed to believe bad things about her to justify what happened to his sons & now he has that bad thing. Now, murderous hatred is bubbling up in him. And that hatred blinds him to reality just like his sexual sin did. Burn her, she's a whore. I knew it all along.
- See what's happening? Internally Judah is consumed by sin. But externally he wants people to think he's religiously pious. Just like his son Onan, Judah wants everyone to think he's a moral God-fearing guy. So he's going to obey the law in the strictest sense and carry out God's justice on her. Killing her for her immorality. Judah is feeling good right now. Secretly he is getting out of that deal with her for his

youngest son. And then right before the fires are lit in a climactic moment fit for Hollywood...

[25] As she was being brought out (to be burned at the stake), she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff."

- UH OH. It's the part of the show where the paternity test is revealed.
- She sends a note that translates to our day: DO THESE LOOK FAMILIAR JUDAH!? And the Jerry Springer studio audience crowd went OHHHHHHH! The truth is finally out! Nobody can believe it! Judah most of all can't believe it.
- Manning Jingle "Don't sleep with your dead son's wife..."
- And something really profound and permanent happens to Judah right here. The story *finally* takes a turn.
- Hebrew word tamar uses for "please identify." – Haker-nah. She's not just saying do you recognize these things? She's forcing him, by God's grace, to recognize himself. Do you see your hypocrisy? Do you see what your sin has done?
- AND RIGHT HERE....Judah has an awakening! A recognizing of who he is and the destruction his sin has caused to himself and those around him He has his Haker-nah. Listen:

[26] Then Judah identified them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her again.

- Judah owns it. Which is big. He realizes his sin and he confesses it. He doesn't run from it or blame shift. He finally stops & sees his true self.
- That's how you know his confession of his sin is genuine right here. See evidence of a true awakening, a haker-nah, is when you begin to see that the people you used to despise, you are no better than. Judah used to think Tamar was the cause of the suffering in his family. Now he realizes he's the destructive one, not her.
- Remember last week in Genesis 37, it was Judah's plan to take the coat, cover it with blood, and show it to his father. The Hebrew words that Judah uses to ask Jacob if he recognizes Joseph's coat, is the same Hebrew words what Tamar uses to ask Judah if he recognizes his things. Haker-nah father?
- See what Moses is showing us? Judah's sin caught up to him. The schemer was schemed and now his sin is exposed. And most important...he didn't run from it. In the face of scandal, he owned it. Only when you see your sin in its fully exposed, raw nastiness can you be ready for God's grace.
- His Haker-nah, his awakening, began with humiliation. That's what must happen. And from there, God began to build something beautiful out of this rubble of a scandal. That's what the last

paragraph is all about. The redemption.

[27] When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. [28] And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." [29] But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore his name was called Perez. [30] Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

- This bizarre birth scene unfolds that is like some sort of wrestling match for who can be born first.
- Perez line jumps around his brother and is born first. So she calls him breach..or breakthrough. But that isn't just because he broke in the birth line.
- It's because out of betrayal, prostitution, and entrapment, comes Perez. Out of the ashes of destruction... Comes the breakthrough... And that's really all we hear about Perez. Until he starts to show up in some genealogies we'll see in a second.

Two foundational truths Judah & Tamar teach us about the gospel

1. Your sin will corrupt and destroy your life

- Judah decides to sleep with a cult prostitute? Bad decision #1. Then gives her all of his identification to hang on to. Bad decision #2. Anybody reading is like...BRO! RUN AWAY!!!!
- **Judah's sin blinded him to its consequences.**
- And that is what God is showing you about your own sin. Sin, especially sexual sin, has a way of blinding you to its effects. The pleasure, the danger, the rush, the comfort all start to feel as if they are taking over and you feel like you lose control and are just being driven by your sexual appetite. And you'll risk anything to satisfy yourself.

- I see this with so many people who are addicted to porn. I met with a leader in Charlotte's anti-human trafficking efforts Friday. She said the porn industry is one of the biggest users of human trafficking. And Charlotte is one of the 5 worst cities in America for porn hits. 63% of Christian men & 15% of Christian women nationally view it regularly² (the numbers go UP locally here)...See here's the thing...your porn addiction damages your sex life with your spouse or future spouse, it sends some people into financial ruin, it hardens your heart to God's voice, and on top of all that..it perpetuates human trafficking. And our

² Survey conducted in 2014 by Barna Group and commissioned by provenmen.org. Full study available here: <http://www.provenmen.org/2014pornsurvey/christian-porn-stats/#frequency>

city is one of the worst perpetuators. But in your sin you are only focused on you and you think the traffickers are the bad guys. But when you are awakened to it...you recognize yourself as the problem. But sin blinds you to all of that

- More light hearted example...I see this happen all the time with people when they are dating Mr. wrong. Everyone around them is like listen, that dude is not right for you. He's not a believer, he's got a long criminal record, and I saw him steal your grandma's purse at dinner the other night! And you are like...He's just misunderstood. I'm sure he was just taking Nana's purse to give it to charity. And what do we all say? No, He's a dirtbag and you are BLIND!
- This is what sin does. It lies to you. It tells you this is going to be great, but when you wake up from it you realize...I'm worse off than before and I've got a wake of destruction behind me.
- Now How do you avoid becoming enslaved to your sin?
- We are going to talk about the only real cure in a second, but one practical step you probably need to take is to get some friends who will point out your blind spots.
- Judah needed somebody to say...DON'T GO TO THE PROSTITUTE BRO! And whatever that thing is in your life, that escape you go to when things are difficult...back to that same old habit...you need somebody saying "don't go back there bro." Which is

why...again...you need to be in a community group. Because you need somebody in your corner who will fight with you for you.

- Example: Girl who wanted to fly to Japan to see married man she thought she was supposed to be with. CGL – nope. Came to her house & took her passport while she was packing. That girl's story later – I was angry at my group leader...for one week. Then I woke up. And realized I was destroying my life.
- Look, Sin blinds you and if left unchecked, it hardens your heart to the voice of God. You need to deputize some people to hunt down the sin in your blind spots.

- **Judah's sin became his children's sin.**

- Judah devised the plan that deceived his dad with the bloody robe of Joseph. So that he could get what he wanted while still retaining the approval of his dad. His son Onan...the reason God killed him was his deceitfulness. He wanted everyone to THINK he was doing right by Tamar, while still setting himself up for success. And God killed him for it.
- And OH BY THE WAY...Judah's dad...his name was Jacob. Jacob DECEIVED HIS DAD to trick him into getting the sacred blessing the firstborn was supposed to get. IN fact, Jacob's name means DECEIVER. LIKE GRANDFATHER, LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON. Here's a really big warning: Your sin and

its consequences will not stay confined to you. You will pass it to your children.

- My dad: Quick temper. Me the past year: quick temper. Haddie: Grrrrr.
- I'm going to show you there is hope here but **first** like Judah, you must see how dangerously destructive your sin is. And man my first reason not to sin most definitely has to be how it separates me from my God. But if I want to feel its effects...I look at my children in their outbursts. And think, oh no they are tiny. Imagine when that is fully grown. Which means for the sake of my children I must allow the gospel to breakthrough into all of my life.

2. The Gospel can break through the destruction caused by the sin in your life.

Your gospel awakening begins in repentance.

For Judah this was verse 26.

[26] Then Judah identified them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her again.

- He was finally confronted with his sin face to face. Which was surprising and painful. This is always the case. The very gospel itself begins with the recognition, the haker-nah, that "I AM A SINNER!" That sin isn't abstract. It is a condition of the human heart that produces sinful acts. And we each have a long history of...well...sinning. Nobody wants to

admit their sin because of how shameful and painful it will be. This is what keeps many drowning in their sin even after they know they need to get out. It's the fear of exposure. That's the lie sin uses to keep you enslaved to it. To keep its power over you. But when you confess that sin to another, it starts to lose its power.

• *When you confess your sin to another Christian...The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power...He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the cross of Jesus Christ. Now he can be a sinner and still enjoy the grace of God. He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship for the first time. The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham; the sin confessed has helped him to find true fellowship with the brethren in Jesus Christ.*³

• And that confession, that Haker-Nah moment, is the entrance to the forgiveness of Christ. Watch...right there it feels like the wrath of God's judgment should finally come down on you. And right there when you realize your sin...he says you are right to feel that way...and I'm going to bring down that

³ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together* (NY, NY Harper Collins, 1954) 113.

judgment...but I'm going to bring it onto Jesus and not you. You will be spared. Because I love you. And when you are that exposed, and receive life in the face of certain death, that is what we Christians call grace. It's the gospel. You get life and Jesus gets your death. And so you can be free from your sin by the power of the gospel.

The gospel breaks through to make you a new creation

Judah is repentant at the end of Genesis 38:26. The next time he shows up in Genesis is with his brothers going to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph (now in charge of Egypt) doesn't know if their hearts have changed so he tests them by framing the youngest brother Benjamin. When Joseph threatens to throw Benjamin into prison, Judah is the one who steps in and begs to take Benjamin's place (44:33). He was willing to give up his own life for the sake of his brother. Where before he was ready to kill his brother to improve his own life. SAME GUY...COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED!

Ex: I'm from Greensboro and there is an old building there that was called Woolworth's. In 1960 it was a whites only lunch spot. And on Feb 1 of that year four African American students from NC A&T went and held a sit in at the whites only lunch counter. A key moment historically in the civil rights movement. TODAY woolworth's is still there. But instead of being home for racism, it is a civil rights museum. Its transformed. It's the same building, but it has a totally

transformed purpose and completely different impact on the people around it.

That's Judah. The Man Once ready to kill his brother, now ready to be killed IN PLACE OF his brother. Same person, yet entirely transformed. And that's the gospel!

1 Cor 6. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

And the whole point of Genesis 38...its Not Judah or Tamar...its their son. Perez. The breakthrough. What Judah meant for evil, God was going to use for good. Look where Perez shows up

- [1] The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. [2] Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, [3] and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron...

God uses the son of sexual scandal to bring about the son of salvation. This is God looking at you and saying your sin is not too deep for me to rescue you. For me to totally transform you.

Do you want freedom from that sin that's been eating at you? Haker-nah. Recognize it. Recognize what its made you.

And then run to Jesus. He will take your judgment and give you life and love you've been searching for.

Transition into communion
