

Genesis 38:1-30

"Sin, Shame & Salvation"

Pulled up out of a pit & sold off as a slave. That was where we left off last week having just begun studying the life of Joseph. It was a situation that brought obvious devastation to his father. However in the end we'll see that God used it to create separation between Joseph & his brothers sparing him from the downward degradation of his family. God was going to bring salvation to the nation of Israel but in order to do that there needed to be some preparation; a separation of Joseph.

God was setting him apart; He was going to raise him up & use him to preserve the nation of Israel but before his exaltation there would be yrs of humiliation (of being humbled). God had shown him that he would reign, but before he reigned he would learn to serve.

Jesus said, *"You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*¹ We spoke last week of how Joseph becomes (again & again) a picture/portrait of Christ throughout his life. Even as Jesus came to the world to be the Servant of mankind prior to being exalted over mankind. So to Joseph would be taken to Egypt (a type of the world in Scripture) where he would become a servant prior to being exalted...

Here in Ch 38 we have sort of a "meanwhile" scene in the saga of Joseph's life. We divert for just a minute & see a stark contrast in what was happening in Judah's life compared to what we'll see take place in Joseph's life.

Listen, the bible is clear: *"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Rom 3:23 It doesn't matter who you are, where you've come from, how old or young you may be; you're a sinner. There's only 1 Man who's ever graced the face of this planet who was w/out sin & that's J.C. Any & everyone else has fallen radically short of the mark of perfection & there's not a single exception. Even the patriarchs were *far, far* from perfect.

Ch 38 is the narrative of Judah's sin & shame. This is another way that the word testifies of it's own veracity. If man were writing their story, they wouldn't look to highlight sinful, shameful things in their lives, that'd be left out. But in the bible God shines a spotlight on it; why? We'll talk a little bit about that in a few minutes.

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Mk 10:42-45). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 1-5

So you can see immediately that Judah was no “shining saint”. You can also see the need for God to separate Joseph in order to one day bring Israel out of Canaan so that they might be preserved in Egypt while they developed as a nation. Because it wouldn’t take long & Jacob’s family would’ve deteriorated down to the level of the Canaanites whom they were living *around* but not staying separate *from* as was God’s plan. Their Canaanite neighbors were *quickly* corrupting them.

Now the bible speaks to this principle. We’re exhorted again & again in scripture to consider carefully whom we befriend, whom it is who we choose to hang out with because it’s inevitable that they will have a certain amount of influence in our lives.

Did you notice what happened here? We read in Vs 1 that it came to pass “at that time”. At what time? At the time of which Joseph was sold off to Egypt; don’t forget how Ch 37 ended. It ended w/Jacob grieving in an inconsolable manner.

That would’ve caused Judah to have to have been confronted by his sin, why? Because it was Judah’s idea to sell him! Now when you’re confronted w/what you’ve done & how you’ve sinned. You can do 1 of 3 things right? You can confess it & repent of it, you can deny it, lie &/or make excuses for it, or you can *run & hide* & try to get away from it.

Judah chose door #3. “Hey I can’t hang out around here anymore, Dad is always down, it’s depressing, I’m out.” So what does he do, “He departed from his brothers.” You guys this was the pivotal move that started the downward spiral that we begin to see in these 1st 5 Vs. He got away from “the family” & began to make friends w/the Canaanites. It’s interesting the way we react when there’s sin in our lives. The hope is that we confess it & repent of it. But unfortunately it’s not uncommon for people to duck & run, fall out of fellowship w/the family of God & begin to interact w/the world.

Once Judah made friends w/Hirah, he met another Canaanite named Shua & he thought his daughter was hot, so he married her. Now he’s unequally yoked, he’s married & making a family w/those who are outside the family of faith. This is why the bible says, *“The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.”*² & Again, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’”*³ In other words, none of us are an exception. We will all receive influence from those we hang around. Therefore we’re to use wisdom in who we allow into our life.

² The New King James Version. (1982). (Pr 12:26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ The New King James Version. (1982). (1 Co 15:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Judah forsook the family of faith to pursue a friendship w/the world & now he's married to an unbeliever, he's having a family in an ungodly environment & it will lead to one tragic situation after the next. Such is always the nature of sin, it always seems like a good idea initially, but ultimately it'll destroy your life.

Vs 6-7

It really shouldn't surprise us that Judah took a Canaanite wife for his son, since he himself was married to a Canaanite. But the tragedy only mounts as we discover that Er was "wicked in the sight of the Lord" so God killed him. As for what his wickedness was, we don't know. But it was bad enough that God saw the need to bring immediate judgment upon him. His dad was out of fellowship w/his believing family, his mom was a Canaanite, those things certainly didn't help promote godliness in his life.

But it can almost be shocking when we read that God "killed" him. Yet sometimes we fail to realize that a man can become so wicked that it's actually an act of mercy for God to put him out of his misery & protect others from his depravity. We just spoke of the fact that sin/wickedness is contagious. The wicked will draw others into their depravity. So for whatever reason, here the Lord deals w/the problem decisively.

Vs 8-10

Do you see what I mean by Judah's sin in forsaking the family/fellowship of believers & choosing to enter into sin leading from one tragedy to another (& it's still not over). None of this would've happened had he simply repented of his sin & stayed put.

But he's speaking here of what's called a "levirate" marriage union, common in that day, later codified in the law in Deut Ch 25 (5-10). If a man died prior to providing a son(s) for his wife, it was the duty of the next oldest brother to marry her & give her a sons. The 1st born son would be considered the heir of the brother who'd died that way the brothers name could carry on & he'd have an heir.

In essence you would be responsible to raise him but he'd receive your brothers estate & you'd receive nothing (in that regard). The idea is that of family taking care of family. However here's the problem. Onan "knew that the heir would not be his" therefore he wouldn't give Tamar children. He was more than happy to use her for sex, but he wouldn't give her a son who would be considered his older brother's.

Now, this Vs is often used as a proof text against birth control. But you need to realize that birth control is not the principle in view here at all...

This passage has nothing to do w/family *planning*, it has to do w/family *plotting*. Onan is despising the directive of his father & trampling on the grave of his brother. **He's selfishly gratifying himself at the expense of his brother's death & he refuses to do the right thing.** The tense of the verbs involved make it clear that this was his pattern, it wasn't like he did this once, he was just using her. So God removed him from the equation as well.

Vs 11

Judah is a little hesitant to give his last son to her ☺. God has already killed the 1st 2 that married her & so he's not so quick to offer up the 3rd. He says, "Well, he's too young right now so let's hold off till he's a little older." But his intentions were to just put her off & move on w/life. So he sends her back to her dad's house & that's where she stays as a widow...

Vs 12-14

She knew that Judah had blown her off & that at this point she'd be forced to face a destitute & very difficult existence in that culture having no husband &/or no children. Understand, it's not like she could just go get a new husband. She was still under her father-in-law's headship, he would determine whom she would marry & since she's not giving her his last son, that leaves her essentially abandoned.

Vs 15-18

It just keeps going from bad to worse doesn't it? This reads like a soap opera script or something. Lies, deception, sex, scandal, death & destruction. Again, this is the nature of sin...

Something else that's being set up here is the stark contrast between Judah & Joseph. As to where Joseph flees temptation, Judah seems to be looking for it. As to where Joseph does everything he can to keep himself pure before God, Judah engages in perversity. Joseph refuses Potiphar's wife, but Judah sleeps w/whom he believes to be a temple prostitute.

We're also seeing the continued harvest of deception in Jacob's family. Judah was party to using a garment (Joseph's tunic) to deceive Jacob, now Tamar uses a garment (a veil) to deceive Judah. Over & over again we continue to see how we reap what we sow.

Now, Judah doesn't have cash, so he asks for credit. She says, what will you give me. He says, "How about a young goat from the flock?"

She says, “Fine, I need a pledge in advance.” “What do you want?” “Your signet ring, the cord it’s hanging on & your staff.” Btw, you ever wonder where the idea of giving a ring as a pledge to keep your wedding vow roots back to? Now you know. It’s a pledge you give whereby you guarantee your intent to keep your word, your vow to your spouse.

Vs 19-23

Judah was too embarrassed to deliver payment himself so he sent it by the hand of his friend. But once she’s nowhere to be found he’s all, “Just leave it be, she can have those things, lest we be shamed.” Sin *always* leads to *shame*. (Rom 6:15-21)

He’s continuing in his pattern of trying to stay hidden. He doesn’t want what he’s done to get out in the open. Adam & Eve tried that... how’d it work out for them? You can be sure (Num32:23) your sin will find you out.

Vs 24-26

Meaning he didn’t know it was her he’d been with a few months earlier & he never slept w/her again.

Question; have you ever noticed how horrible your sin looks... in someone else’s life? It’s amazing how critical & harsh we can be against others who have fallen in the same sin we ourselves struggle with. Paul the apostle said it like this, *“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”*⁴

Judah acts all offended, like he can’t believe she’d do something like that. He’s all, “Bring her out & let her be burned.” He’s probably thinking he’ll finally be able to be rid of her & be free from the guilt of not giving his last son to her, it all worked out for him... The fact is (however) that his sin is preparing to find him out & if anyone winds up getting burned in this story, it’s Judah!

We see this same kind of principle in another man’s life, any guesses? King David. Nathan (the prophet) comes to him & shares w/him the story of a wealthy man who had all kinds of resources at his disposal & a poor man who had only one little ewe lamb that was like a child to him. He kept it in his house, let it eat from his dish & drink from his cup... & A traveler came to the rich man & refusing to take from his own herd, he took the poor man’s lamb & killed it & used it to feed the traveler.

⁴ The New King James Version. (1982). (Ro 2:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

David got ticked! He was all, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! & He’ll restore 4 fold for the lamb, because he had no pity.” Nathan was all, “You are the man!” & He went on to speak to him of how God had blessed him so abundantly but he killed Uriah the Hittite & took his wife to be his own. David admitted his sin & repented before the Lord.

But the point is that when he saw that same double standard in someone else it infuriated him. But when it was exposed in him, he cried out for mercy. He wanted that “sinner” judged, until he found out *he* was the sinner. Here Judah does the same thing.

Jesus said, “...*why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*”⁵

Last week we got a glimpse into just how “dysfunctional” the family of Jacob was. Hating Joseph, selling him as a slave, lying to their dad (who’d deceived & was now being deceived), Reuben had slept w/his dad’s concubine, Simeon & Levi murdered a city, Judah came up w/the plan to sell Joseph... These were the Patriarchs of the nation of Israel, the nation through whom God would bring the Messiah, Judah specifically! He would entrust to them the oracles of God... yet as we study their lives we realize that these guys were *far* from perfect. Some of them were deliberately disobedient; yet God would use them to accomplish His purposes.

We spoke in our introduction & posed the question, *why would God shine a spot light on all these imperfections, theses sins & shortcomings in the lives of those whom He used so radically? There are probably many reasons but the one I want to emphasize is this; so often we can have the impression that God will only use perfect people...* Those who have it their act together; who don’t have any *real* problems, yet as we study the scriptures it blows our minds how messed up the people were whom God actually enlisted into His plan. *People w/shady pasts, people w/present problems, people who would perhaps be considered cast offs or societal rejects, & I love that because that tells me something... If God can use them & do great things through them, than God can use me & do great things through me as well.*

This in *no way justifies* man’s sin, it *magnifies* God’s grace.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 7:3-5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Paul approached this principle in the book of Corinthians (let's look at it together). (1 Cor 1:26-31).

This is the greatness of our God, He can take messed up, broken down, imperfect kind of lives, & through them accomplish His perfect plan & purpose.

Tamar is all, "Hey, before you get the fire going, do you recognize these things, because I'm pregnant by the man to whom they belong." You can be sure your sin will find you out. Judah confesses, "She has been more righteous than I because I didn't give her to Shelah my son." Now 2 wrongs don't make a right, but here we see the sovereignty of God in governing in the affairs of human life. Check it out.

Vs 27-30

From sin & shame to salvation. This is the grace of God. When you get to Matt Ch 1 & Luke Ch 3, Perez is listed as an ancestor of J.C. Himself (our Savior). Tamar makes it into the lineage (who acted as a harlot). Rahab enters the line (who was a professional harlot) & of course Ruth the Moabitess.

God used their lives, not because of their works, but because of His grace. You guys, your Lord (though sinless) comes from a long line of sinners. His ancestry was riddled w/issues... If you were God, & you were bringing your Son into the world, what kind of lineage would you provide for Him? Royalty! High moral integrity! High values spiritually! Jesus came from all kinds of different people. Jews, Gentiles, royalty, poverty, prophets & average people. Therefore it doesn't matter who you are, where you've been, what you've done or where you've come from. Jesus understands you, He loves you & He has laid down His life *for* you.

He came through sinners to reach out *to* sinners, to seek & to save that which was lost. You may blow it horrifically, unspeakably. But God has this way of saying, "If you'll turn *to* Me, if you'll trust *in* Me, I can turn even your greatest mistakes around & use you radically for My glory." From sin, to shame, to salvation, God's grace is truly amazing... Amen? Amen.

Prayer Points:

Father we thank You for placing on display such an amazing example of Your grace. It's not sin justified, it's Your grace magnified. We thank You for Jesus, who identifies with us & has died *for* us, paying the price we never could & we praise Your name.

The grace of God is available to you today. I don't care where you've been or what you've done. If you want Christ to come into your life, forgive you of your sin & make you new. Turn from your sin, & trust in Him today.