

- Have you ever done something that made you feel like you were disqualified for something else?
- You had 3 jobs in 3 years so you figured you could never talk about work with someone.
- You divorced or bankrupted so you're certainly not going to give advice on relationships or money.
- You led something that did not go well or got criticized or that you just didn't like and you thought "I'll never do that again."
- Or maybe you just did something for a long time and now you feel you should be able to sit back and do nothing.
- Most of us have at one point or another felt this about something. Sometimes it's our own bad choices and sometimes it is bad experiences.
- What we are going to see in today's story is this idea here: **God's grace means he is not done with you.**

- We began a short little series, called "Unusual Encounters", of some bible stories that maybe you haven't read, or when you did, you thought, "What was that all about?"
- First we looked at a story from about a young man named Eutychus who fell asleep during a late night service and fell to his death from a third floor window. Last week we looked at Elisha and the case of sic'ing bears on those who teased him.
- If you haven't listened to these, I encourage you to go on back and do so.
- Today, we are going back almost another 1000 years before Elisha to a little known story that is found in the middle of a VERY well known story.
- If you want to follow along, we will be in Genesis 38.
- The VERY well known story is one that most of you are familiar with. It's the story of Joseph. Joseph was the second youngest son of Jacob, the first son of his favorite wife. He is a bit of an arrogant young man and he acts in a manner that gets his brothers to hate him.
- When the opportune moment hits, his brothers grab him and sell him into slavery in Egypt, thinking they are rid of him. Then we follow this amazing story of the ups and downs of Joseph's life and how God makes him ruler of Egypt and many years later uses Joseph to save his entire family.
- Genesis devotes 14 chapters to this account (37-50). It is a key part of the development of Israel as a nation.
- But just as the story begins to get going, there is another story inserted. One that I read recently, and it got me thinking, as it has before, "why is this here?" It's like watching a movie and then going to commercial right when we are getting engaged. Joseph has had this traumatic experience, his dad thinks he's dead, but he has been sold to a prominent official. What is going to happen next.
- Then we get this side bar. It's the story of Judah and Tamar. It is not a boring story for sure. You might even call it a bit racy. So much so it is a little cringeworthy. And when it is done, you wonder . . . um, what?!
- So let's jump into it. It begins like this:
Genesis 38:1 At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah. 2 There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and made love to her; 3 she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er. 4 She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. 5 She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah.
- Judah, the fourth oldest son of Jacob, leaves home and heads to a place where the Canaanite people live. A people who worshiped other gods, and he meets a woman. They get married and he has three sons.

- Judah found a wife for his oldest, Er, named Tamar. But Judah's oldest son was a wicked man and we simply read that he *"was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death."*
- We know no particulars, but he was bad enough that God had enough and he died.
- Tamar was now a widow, but during those times there was a custom that required the brother of the dead man to marry his brother's widow and father a son who would assume the dead man's name.
- This meant that Onan, the next oldest son, was to marry Tamar, have a child, and this child would carry on the first dad's name and inherit his estate and so on. It was a way of keeping a family from dying out.
- You can read the details, but Onan wasn't very thrilled with the situation, so he would have sex with Tamar but, how do I put this delicately, he would never finish the deed in a way that Tamar could get pregnant.
- Basically, Onan took advantage of the situation sexually but he refused the responsibility that went with it. This was wicked and so we read that God took his life as well.
- This left the youngest son now to be Tamar's husband. But Judah did not deal well with Tamar. He told her to go home, live as a widow (twice now) in her father's house and when Shelah was the appropriate age, he would maybe give him to her as a husband.
- After a few years, it became apparent to Tamar that Judah had no intention of keeping his word. He was worried that his third son might die like the first two and so he ignored his responsibility and ignored his daughter-in-law.
- Let's pick up the story again.

12 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 Hirah the Adullamite went with him. 13 When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep," 14 she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, 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.

- Tamar took things into her own hands. She had a plan. She covered her face, dressed as a prostitute and positioned herself where Judah was going to be.
- Judah was a widower himself now, and when he saw her, he decided he wanted her and so he began to haggle with her for her services.
- They agreed he would give her a goat from his flock for a one-night stand but since he did not have it with him, he gave her his personal seal (which was used to sign correspondence) and his staff. It was almost like having her hold his passport or driver's license.
- They did the deed and he went on his way and Tamar took off her disguise and went back to her father's house and put on her widow clothes. And just as she had hoped, she became pregnant.

20 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. 21 He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?" "There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said. 22 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.'" 23 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."

- Judah went to live up so his obligation but could not find her, so since he did not want his behavior to be widely known, he just let it lie.

24 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 have her burned to death!"

- Pretty self-righteous for a man who had done what he had done. This was also totally selfish on Judah's part because if she died, his obligation to her ended, his third son would not have to marry her, and he could move on with his life. Nice guy, huh?
- But Tamar was a smart woman. She had planned to cover herself well. They went to get her to punish her and she said, "I have the seal and staff of the father right here!"
- She says innocently, "Do you recognize them?"

26 Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

- Judah got a major slap in the face and he realized that his behavior had been sinful and selfish. Tamar's manipulation and planning were actually more righteous than him because even though it was deceitful, she was being faithful to his family and only doing what Judah should have taken the steps to do in the first place.
- In humility he confesses his deficiency and begins to change his behavior.
- Then we read that Tamar ends up having twins as a result of this event.
- That ends the chapter and then the writer goes right back and picks up the story of Joseph.
- As the reader, you are left wondering, "what did that story have to do with anything?"
- Some people focus on Tamar and how she acted.
- Others look at this in relation to the chapter after and compare how Joseph handled sexual temptation completely differently than his older brother Judah.
- This are good, but I believe there is something much larger at play here, and it all has to do with Judah.
- Judah is the fourth oldest son of Jacob, behind Reuben, Simeon, Levi.
- The author paints a picture of Judah that started in the chapter before.
- Judah is the one who arranged to sell Joseph into slavery.

Gen 37:26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

- He saves his life, but it is a small thing because he is condemning him to a life of servitude.
- Then, as we already read, he went to live away from family and marries a Canaanite woman.
- That doesn't seem like a big deal to us, but the original audience of this story would have been horrified. To leave his family, his faith community, was to abandon the covenant, protection, and blessings of God.
- He followed his own interest only. He married someone who followed after other gods. He does a lousy job of raising up his sons. He sleeps around.
- The whole story of Tamar shows repeatedly his selfishness. He doesn't treat Tamar well. He hypocritically calls for her death.
- But then the whole story turns on his confession when he realized his own sinfulness, Tamar's righteousness and he begins to change.
- Because now, as we go through the story of Joseph, we see a marked change in Judah.
- After the brothers go to Egypt and encounter Joseph the first time, still not knowing who he was, and then go home, Judah becomes the voice of reason with his father. It is Judah who takes the lead among all his brothers to make sure Benjamin comes with them so they could get more food (Gen 43:3-5)

- In fact, Judah takes responsibility for the youngest brother for that trip to Egypt

Gen 43:8 Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. 9 I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life."

- If you remember the story, Joseph sets up this whole scenario so that Benjamin gets blamed for a theft he did not commit. He wants to see if his brothers had changed.
- We read again that when they came back to plead their case, it is Judah who takes the lead. He is the spokesperson for the family. He is the one who takes responsibility for a crime that they did not even commit. (Gen 44:14-16)
- When Joseph demands that Benjamin stay in prison and the rest of the brothers are free to go, it is Judah who makes an impassioned plea and offers to sacrifice himself for his brother Benjamin.

Gen 44:18 Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. . . 33 "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. 34 How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."

- What has happened? This is not even the same man any more. His actions are those of a man who has been completely changed from the inside out.
- He has become the leader, the one with integrity, the spokesperson, the one whom everyone trusts.
- Even when Joseph is revealed and he sends for his father, it is Judah, not the oldest, that Jacob sends ahead as the family's trusted representative. (Gen 46:27-28)
- The entire story is one that illustrates the grace of God.
- That is why chapter 38, the story of Judah and Tamar is there. It is the change point. It is that event that turned Judah's life in a new direction. It illustrates the principle that I want you to take from this morning.
- **God's grace means he is not done with you. [leave this up until I say it again]**
- Judah was a messed up man. A man with a past. A man with a litany of sins to his name. A man with mistakes, relational compromise, and selfishness. Nevertheless God providentially rehabilitated him. God's amazing, scandalous grace was a work in this man.
- His grace meant he had something for Judah and would not give up on him.
- [LEAN INTO THE CAMERA]
- Don't dismiss this.
- **God's grace means he is not done with you.**
- I don't know your past. What you have done. How you have acted. What you have said.
- I don't know what you think disqualifies you from God's love and purpose.
- I don't have a knowledge of all the things that go through your mind about this week, this year, or your past life that makes it difficult to embrace that God likes you and has a plan for you to make a difference.
- **God's grace means he is not done with you.**
- I do know that I have countless people with messed up lives that God has used.
- People who were abused and utterly angry, selfish people and who now God uses to care for and help others.
- Those who were in the depths of drug addiction to the point of death and now are leaders that God is using to bring many to Jesus.
- People who were relationship messes, divorced, with no hope, and now are in a place where they can counsel others.
- Those who had made so many mistakes that they thought they were just going to live out the string, and now have positions of leadership and influence.

- **God's grace means he is not done with you.**
- I don't care how old you are, what kind of person you are or think you are, how you have served or not served in the past, God's grace means he is inviting you to respond.
- Here's the thing. We are always free to lean into God's grace or reject it.
- Will you lean into God's grace? Will you accept that you cannot earn, perform or act in such a way that God will suddenly approve of you or use you? Will you realize that God's grace is what is required and that all you have to do is respond to it?
- It's simple. But to live in grace is a long term journey. It is often difficult. BUT, **God's grace means he is not done with you.**
- What is he inviting you into? Don't disqualify yourself. Just accept his grace and lean into a life of living under that grace.
- For Judah, there was a turning point.
- A point that made him realize he was not who God wanted him to be.
- He applied himself to change, and slowly became the man that God wanted him to be from the very beginning.
- His life changed so dramatically that by the end of Genesis he's given leadership of the tribe. God used him and his legacy in ways that are hard to understand.
- His own father's prophetic blessing at the end of his life indicated that Judah's family will be a family that would rule. (Genesis 49:10)
- The artisan that God picked to design and oversee construction of the first place of worship, the tabernacle, was from the tribe of Judah.
- Judah was the tribe God picked to set out first when leading the Israelites in the wilderness.
- When the tabernacle was dedicated, the first offering came from the tribe of Judah.
- Caleb, one of the two good spies, was from the tribe of Judah.
- Tribe of Judah was designated to lead attacks after the death of Joshua
- Eventually Judah became the name of the southern kingdom of Israel, the one that kept them alive as a nation.
- David, Israel's greatest king, came from the tribe of Judah.
- Tamar is highlighted in the lineage of Judah, from which Jesus, the Savior of the whole world, was born.
- At the very end of Scripture, in Revelation, as the world is remade, Jesus is called "The Lion of the tribe of Judah."
- And it all started in Genesis 38.
- **God's grace means he is not done with you.** The twisted parts of our lives point to Jesus. He is our hope. If your life is a mess, he can still become the center. This is his grace and he delights to make it known to you and to me.
- The story of Judah and Tamar reminds us that God's grace and His plan are far greater than our sin. We make messes...and God turns it into a message of grace.
- May you each embrace his grace, and I can't wait to see what he's gonna do through you.