

Genesis Ch38v1-30 - Promiscuity And Promise

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[0 : 00] If you're able to, stay for sandwiches and cake, a cup of tea, great way to catch up. And thank you for your prayers for myself and Kirsty.

When we were over in Sheffield, it was a great time. It was good to visit Amy, to see and to meet people that she's with every day. Just setting up something here.

Can't do two things at once. Thank you. So, yeah, and I'm sure Kirsty actually would appreciate your prayers.

She would have been here, only she's done her back in, so she's not able to be here this afternoon. But we're both grateful and thankful for your prayers for us while we were away.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Genesis chapter 38. We're looking at a new series in the life of Joseph. But maybe you'll already know this, but chapter 38 says nothing of Joseph at all.

[1 : 05] So we go from chapter 37 about Joseph, then to chapter 39 all about Joseph. And then we get this, well, you'll see a strange story, an account that we read about in chapter 38.

But it's there for a reason, and that's good. So we're going to read Genesis chapter 38. It's at the beginning of your Bible. First book in the Bible.

And we're going to read from verses 1 to 14. So let's hear God's word. 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 Shuha. He married her, made love to her. 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 still to another son and named him Shelah.

[2 : 12] It was at Kazib that 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 that 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 Shuha, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hera, the Adolamite, went with him.

[3 : 41] When Tamar was told, Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep, she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself.

Then she sat down at the entrance to Aneim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that though Shelah had grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

Well, we're going to look at the whole story, but we're going to stop our reading there and pray and ask for God's help as we look at his word. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for these old accounts, but yet true accounts of individuals and families living life just as us that have been written down and recorded to teach us about the wonder and goodness and redemption of God.

And so we pray that as we look at this story together, we would see the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has come to redeem people like us, to bring us into your family.

So help us now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when we were younger, my sister decided she was going to run away.

[5 : 26] She was about eight or nine. For some reason, she had felt let down by her family, probably annoyed by her younger brother. So one day, she just ran away down to the bottom of the road.

About 20 minutes later, she arrived home and burst into tears. Inquiring what was wrong, she told my mum she had run away and no one had come looking for her.

But isn't that why we run away? So no one can find you. What do we do with a runaway?

Well, our friend Judah that we're reading about in chapter 38 is on the run. Chapter 37 told us he had sold his younger brother Joseph off as a slave.

And to make matters worse, Judah told his father that Joseph had been killed by wild animals. Now Judah wants out.

[6 : 35] So, verse 1. At that time, at the time of all those events with Joseph, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam near named Hera.

Judah literally turns his back on his family and runs away from his past. However, Judah isn't just running from home.

He's turning his back on God. You see, Judah was part of God's chosen family. His great-grandfather was Abraham.

And God had made a promise to Abraham that through his family, all the nations of the world would be blessed. Well, we're now three generations later from Abraham and this family is a dysfunctional mess.

Judah, it seems, has no interest in God's plans or God's promises. Judah has walked out and turned his back on God.

[7 : 41] He has run away. What will God do with a runaway? Now we may not be a Judah, but we do know what it is to run away from God, don't we?

It's what we do all the time in big ways and in small ways. Despite God being our creator and our provider, we decide that we want to have nothing to do with God's plans and promises.

We so often turn our back on God, live our own way and run away. What does God do with runaways like us?

Well, we're in for a big surprise. Because in our text, in this story, we're going to see four surprising responses from God.

Here's the first big surprise. The surprising mercy God shows. The surprising mercy God shows.

[8 : 47] The first thing Jacob does as he runs away is to get himself a wife. Verse 2. There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shuha. He married her and made love to her.

Together they had three children that we read about. Er, Onan, and Shelah. All seems well. His runaway has been good. He now has a family. But we're in for a surprise, aren't we?

Verse 6. 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. It's a tragedy for the family. The firstborn, through whom the family line is going to continue, is now dead.

But all is not lost because Judah has two more sons, hasn't he? However, son number two, it seems, is no better. Onan's responsibility, according to custom and tradition, was to become a kind of surrogate father for his dead brother's wife.

[10 : 03] So, verse 9. But Onan knew that the child would not be his, so that 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. To lose one son is bad enough, but to lose two?

Judah, it seems, is forced to take action. Instead of giving his son, his third son, to Tamar, he sends Tamar back childless to her father and keeps his son wrapped in cotton wool at home.

Now, we can have a little bit of sympathy for Judah. Things didn't go well for the first two sons, so best to keep son number three well away from this Tamar girl.

It seems that bad things happen whenever she's around. You could lose your life. End of verse 11. For he thought, he, that is Shelah, may die too, just like his brothers.

[11 : 20] So Tamar went to live in her father's household. Now again, thinking about this, and if we were in Judah's situation, we might do the same.

But that's not what Judah is meant to do. He's meant to follow God's plan. Remember, Jacob is part of, or Judah is part of, God's chosen family through whom the nations of the world will be blessed. He's meant to preserve the seed of the firstborn, not cut it off. His responsibility is to make sure that the family line continues. He's to live God's way, not his own way.

So what's God going to do with a runaway like Judah? Well, considering what God did to Heir and Onan for being wicked and disobedient, my goodness me, it seems God should put Judah to death for attempting to scupper God's plan and promise.

You see, the big surprise in this story is not that Aaron and Onan die, but that Judah does not die. [12:34] It's a surprising mercy. His life is spared. Now, our sensitive, selfish hearts may find God's judgment hard as we read these verses, but death is what we deserve for turning our backs on God.

The Bible is very clear on that from beginning to end at the start of Genesis when Adam and Eve turned against God, death came into the world. It's why the New Testament writers will say the wages of sin is death.

You see, the fact that you and I get out of bed each morning is a mercy. Despite our continued running from God and turning our back on God, God doesn't always treat us as our sins deserve. We should be astounded and amazed at the kindness and goodness of God. So what does God do with a runaway? Well, God shows surprising mercy.

But there's more surprises the surprising way, second, that God works, the surprising way God works. Judah's wife dies and after a time of mourning, Judah heads off with his buddy, Hera.

[14:04] We might say they've gone on a lad's trip. But news of this trip has travelled to Tamar. Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute right along the road that Judah and his brother, his buddy, are travelling.

Why would she do that? Well, we're given a clue at the end of verse 14. See the end verse 14, for she thought that though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife. She's not going to have any children, and children were important. On with the story, we pick it up in verse 15. So there's a Tamar dressed as a prostitute on the side of the road, and Judah's on his way.

Verse 15, when Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realising that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, come now, let me sleep with you.

He's essentially demanding sex. And what will you give me to sleep with you? She asked. I'll send you a young goat from my flock, he said.

[15:36] 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 hand, she answered.

Basically, she's saying, give me your wallet and your keys, and then I'll know who you are. 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. Now what are we to make of this sordid sexual encounter?

What does God do with a runaway like Judah? Well, let's be clear. It's a very sad account of sinful desires and desperate measures.

Judah, it seems, has cared very little for Tamar, and now it seems he cares very little for women. He sees an opportunity to satisfy his desires and exploits a vulnerable prostitute.

[16:45] He gets what he wants and leaves her with the consequences. Tamar, on the other hand, well, she's lost her husband.

She's been abused by her brother-in-law who doesn't give her children but just takes advantage and sleeps with her. and she's ignored by her father-in-law who sent her away.

And on top of all of that, she has no children. And children in those days were not just your children, your family. It was a means of security and provision who would care for you and look after you in older age.

She's left in desperation, which leads to desperate measures. for Tamar, this is all about survival. For Judah, it's about a good time.

In this sad and broken encounter, Judah gets what he wants and Tamar gets what she wants. Judah has his way and Tamar gets pregnant.

[17 : 55] It's a win-win kind of situation. but the consequences are terrible as we will see. But there's something more going on in this account.

Tamar is pregnant by Judah. The very thing that Judah has been trying to avoid has actually come to pass. He might know anything about who Tamar is and the fact that she's pregnant, but at this stage, well, there is a firstborn.

Well, a firstborn in the womb, anyway. You see, God's plan was that the family of Judah would be a blessing to the nations. And you can't be a blessing if the family comes to an abrupt end. And so through this sordid sexual encounter, the family of promise continues. it's not what we expect, is it?

A story like this in the Bible? It catches us all off guard. God's ways surprise us. It's not that God condones the actions of Judah or Tamar.

[19 : 11] Rather, God is at work through sinful choices and scheming plans of the individuals for his purpose. us. You see, in our runaway moments, we may engage in all kinds of sinful behaviour.

We may revert to all kinds of desperate actions. We may feel that in the midst of it all, all is lost and all is broken. And while we still remain responsible for our choices and decisions, our sin is not a hindrance to God.

working out his purposes in our life and through our life. So what does God do with a runaway like Judah? What does God do with runaways like us?

Well, God works in surprising ways through our mess for our good. So, surprising mercy, surprising way, and surprising transformation that God brings.

The surprising transformation that God brings. Judah has long forgotten his liaison and he certainly knows nothing of Tamar's pregnancy.

[20 : 35] But all that is to change in a very surprising way. Realizing that he's let the desires in his heart get the better of him, Judah sends his friend to go and search for this prostitute.

The plan is to exchange the goat for those identity items. He wants his wallet and his keys back. They could get him in trouble.

Only there's one small problem. Let's pick it up in verse 22. So his friend went back to Judah and said, I can't find her.

I've been looking all over. I even asked around in the town and they all said there's no prostitute here. 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. Best to keep a lid on these things. Let's not make too much of a fuss.

[21 : 45] The last thing Judah wants is to see his face sprawled across the front pages of the local gossip. However, verse 24, about three months later, Judah was told, your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution and as a result, she's now pregnant.

Judah said, bring her out and let her be burned to death. Judah, it seems, still blames Tamar for the deaths of his sons.

He doesn't like her. Now's his chance to get rid of that cursed woman. And in such a culture and society, there would have been little opposition to what they wanted to do.

But, verse 25, as she was being brought out to her death penalty, she sent a message to her father-in-law.

I'm pregnant by the man who owns these, she said. And then she added, do you recognise this seal, this cord, and this staff?

[23 : 05] Well, like an ice-cold bath, Judah is woken up to the horror of his ways. Judah is confronted with his own sin.

And the evidence couldn't be ignored. They all belong to him. The judgement that he passed on Tamar is a judgement that now belongs to him.

Tamar's words must have smashed through his hard heart. Do you recognise this cord and staff? Judah, is this your wallet and keys?

Ironically, the place where this sexual sin took place, as we read in verse 14, was a place called eneim, which means opening of the eyes.

Well, Judah's eyes have been opened wide now. But all of this was to do good in Judah's life.

[24 : 15] It seems there is a conversion moment in his life. He no longer hides his sin. Judah now comes clean.

Rather than running from his sin, which he did over his brother Joseph, he now owns his sin. Verse 26, Judah did recognize them and said, Tamar is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.

And he didn't sleep with her again. In other words, he treated her as he should have done with respect. What does God do with runaways?

Well, it seems he confronts us with our sin. He opens up our blind eyes so that we can take responsibility for our behavior and our actions and confess.

For Judah, it was life transforming. Just have a look forward to chapter 44 in your Bible. Chapter 44, the very end of the chapter. This is later on when, in fact, Judah will be confronted by his younger brother, Joseph, who he'd sold into slavery.

[25 : 37] And at last, Judah doesn't run from his mess, but he's learned to take responsibility for his behavior of the past. So, speaking to his brother Joseph, look at verse 33.

this is what Judah says, Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, one of his other brothers, and let him return with his brothers.

You see, he wants to take responsibility. He wants to become a slave to Joseph for his behavior and his actions towards him.

Let's go back to chapter 38. You see, there is no sin so great. There is no past so horrid.

There is no heart so hard that God cannot change or transform. What does God do with runaways?

[26 : 44] God surprisingly transforms the worst of sinners like us. But there is one more surprise, I think the greatest of them all, the surprising grace God displays.

Judah has been confronted with his sin. He has confessed his sin. He has owned up to it. His life has been changed and transformed. He is no longer hiding things but willing to take responsibility for it.

He is transformed. That is God's grace. Tamar, well, she has become pregnant and as we will see, gives birth to two children.

At last, she has security and provision for her later life. That's God's grace. But more than that, surprisingly in this story, there is grace for us because out of this family, grace breaks free and comes to you and to I.

Look at verse 27. When the time came for Tamar to give birth, there were twins 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.

[28 : 16] But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out and she said, so this is how you've broken out. And he named him Perez, which means breaking out.

Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, well, he came out after and he was named Zerah. What a strange account.

Why all this pushing and shoving in the womb? Well, when everyone in the labour room thought Zerah was the firstborn, surprise, it wasn't Zerah, but Perez.

It seems that in the mess and brokenness of life, God is going to have the last word. Perez breaks through and he comes out first.

Well, what's the significance of that? Well, Perez, the son of Judah and Tamar, is going to play a significant role in God's plan and promise. Well, what role is he going to play?

[29 : 26] Well, look with me to Matthew chapter one. Matthew's gospel, the first in the New Testament, Matthew chapter one.

Matthew opens his account by giving us the genealogy of Jesus, where he can trace his family line. This is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Verse two, Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac, the father of Jacob, Jacob, the father of Judah, who we've just been reading and listening about, and his brothers.

Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, and Perez was the father of Hezron.

And so all the way down, we continue to read, and then we come to verse 16, and Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

[30 : 50] Messiah. You see, this is grace. From the family line of Perez, from Abraham and Isaac, to Judah, to Perez, come the saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, the one who would bring blessing to the nations.

You see, God doesn't hide from runaways. God comes to search for runaways. By including the names of Judah and Tamar in the genealogy of Jesus, we're reminded that God comes through a family that was broken and messy, much as we are.

A family with a story full of sinful desires and desperate measures, but yet, through the brokenness of it all, grace breaks through. Grace will have the last word.

You see, we shouldn't be surprised that as we read through Matthew's gospel and the other gospels, we meet Jesus, who meets who? Who does he spend time with?

Sinners and prostitutes. Because Jesus came to seek and save the runaways. He came for both the perpetrator and the victim, for Judah's and for Tamar's.

[32 : 17] he came to humble the proud and welcome the humble. Just as a newborn through Tamar broke out centuries ago, so the Son of God has come and now he breaks through into the brokenness of our world and our lives, shoving and pushing and doing all that is necessary to reach us, even working through all our mess and sin so that we can meet the Saviour.

What does God do with runaways? Well, he sends his Son, Jesus, into the sinful mess of our world so that he might find us, that he might die for us, that he might forgive us, that he might change us. He seeks us out so that we might receive his mercy. That's the surprising grace God displays to runaways like you and me.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, as we reflect on this family story, we see mess and sin, wrong choices, terrible decisions, but yet winding its way through and overflowing it all is the amazing mercy and grace of God, who comes searching for us, who never leaves us, but comes looking to save.

Thank you, God, that you have reached down to us through your Son, Jesus Christ, that you have broken into the mess of our lives and you have brought your grace to us.

[34 : 38] Father, forgive us when we have turned our back on you. Please help us that we would confess our sin, own up, take responsibility for our life, and know your amazing grace that sets us free and transforms us for good.

thank you, God, that you redeem runaways like us. Amen.

well, we're going to sing together. Our sins can be many, like Judah and Tamar, but his mercy and his grace is dead.

Meghan had so dead. God, man, he's Give Victim Tir Ryse. Mark, inASH NO, every verse nothing here. You have so happened to be license,■■■■, Heil, Manhattan, Jesusiv■.

We've got so after this grace,■■■■ effort.