

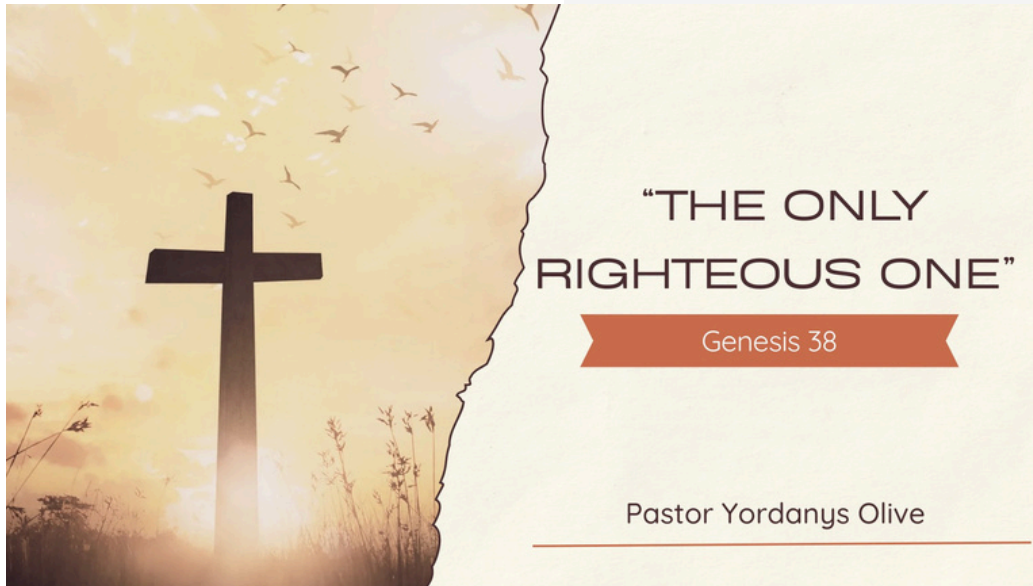
CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2026
GENESIS 38:1-30

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THE ONLY RIGHTEOUS ONE



A couple of weeks ago, I went with my family to the movies to watch David. When we got to our seats, there was a sweet older lady sitting in one of our reserved seats. She told us, "They gave me this seat." So, we asked her, "What movie are you here to watch?" She named a different movie. That's when she realized she wasn't watching a commercial as she thought she was rather; she was in the wrong movie. That's how many people feel when they get to Genesis 38.

Last week we were in the story of Joseph. Everything was moving forward. Then suddenly we get to this chapter about Judah, right in the middle of Joseph's story, and it feels like, Why are we here?
Did we change stories?
But this is not a commercial.
And it's not a mistake.
Genesis 38 is here on purpose.

This chapter is about Judah. Yes, the same Judah we met in Genesis 37, the one who proposed selling his own brother Joseph.
Judah is very different from Joseph.
Joseph obeys God.
Judah makes bad choices.
Joseph runs from sin.
Judah seemingly runs to sin.

And here's the surprising part:
God chose Judah, not Joseph, to carry the family line that would ultimately lead to Jesus. Scripture tells us that Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. **Revelation 5:5**

Judah is not chosen because he is better, he is chosen because God is gracious. This chapter shows us that God's plan does not depend on perfect people. Judah messes up, but God is still working and wants to restore and use people that wouldn't be the right candidates before people's eyes. This chapter is beautiful example of God's amazing grace.

God chooses and uses broken people to accomplish His purposes. So today, we're not in the wrong story. This chapter matters from the perspective of the lineage of Jesus and God has something important to show us here. **Genesis 38:1-5**

About this time, Judah left home. Judah walks away from his father's house and goes to live in Adullam, among the Canaanites. We're not told exactly why he left, but the context helps us understand what's happening. Joseph is gone, the family is broken, and Jacob clearly favored Rachel's sons. Instead of dealing with the situation, Judah creates distance.

He left his father's house and moved to Adullam, where he stayed with a man named Hirah.

While living there, Judah marries a Canaanite woman. God's will was already clear on marrying Canaanite women. Abraham and Isaac were intentional about not allowing their son to marry the Canaanites.

This was not racial discrimination. God was not rejecting the Canaanites because of their ethnicity. The issue was spiritual and moral, not racial. God was protecting His covenant people from being shaped by influences of these Canaanite women that were completely opposed to His ways.

So, Judah wasn't just far from his father's house physically; he was also drifting away from his father's convictions. He chose to live close to people who were far from God.

The text also shows us a pattern we've seen before in Scripture. **Verse 2** says that Judah saw a Canaanite woman and took her as his wife. That language should sound familiar. In the Garden of Eden, Eve saw the fruit, took it, and the result was death. Here we see the same pattern: see, take, and the result is evil.

When decisions are driven by what looks good instead of what God has said, the outcome is always destructive.

And now, in the next verses, we begin to see the consequences of those choices not just in Judah's life, but in his family. **Genesis 38:6-10**

Er was Judah's firstborn, and Scripture tells us something about him: "Er was a wicked man in the Lord's sight, so the Lord took his life." We're not told exactly what Er did, but we are told how God saw it.

His wickedness wasn't hidden or excusable; it was serious enough that God Himself intervened. This reminds us that even before the Law was given, (The 10 Commandments) God still held people accountable for evil.

At this point, we are introduced to Tamar.



She was a Canaanite woman, and her name means “Date palm.” In the ancient world, the date palm symbolized life that endures, beauty, victory, and prosperity. And yet, despite the meaning of her name, Tamar quickly becomes a widow.

From the very beginning, her story is marked by loss and injustice. And it’s important to remember that Tamar will later be one of the women mentioned in Jesus’s genealogy.

Matthew 1:3

Even as a Canaanite widow, God places her in the line through which the Savior would come, and we will see how that happened in this chapter.

After Er’s death, we are introduced to Onan, his brother, who marries Tamar. And you might be wondering: Why did Onan marry his brother’s wife?

The text mentions “the law,” it’s referring to levirate marriage, a practice that existed before the Law of Moses and was later included in God’s Law in **Deuteronomy 25**

LEVIRATE:
Comes from the Latin word levir,
meaning “husband’s brother.”

The purpose was to protect a vulnerable widow and preserve the family line. Any child born from that union would legally belong to the deceased brother and carry on his name.

I know that this may feel uncomfortable to us today, but back then it was a system meant to protect and care for the vulnerable, not to promote immorality.

In the ancient world, a widow needed children in order to survive. There were no social systems or insurance, especially for women like Tamar. Without children, she had no protection, no provision, and no future security.

Children weren’t just a blessing; they were survival. That’s why levirate marriage existed.

Levirate marriage meant that if a man died without children, his brother was to marry the widow, and the first son born would carry the name and inheritance of the deceased brother, not his own. This law existed to keep a widow protected and provided for within the family.

So when Onan refused to give Tamar a child, he wasn’t just making a personal decision he was stripping her of security, dignity, and a future, leaving her exposed to poverty, shame, and vulnerability.

So, The Lord considered it evil. Onan married Tamar, but he refused to fulfill his responsibility of having children to carry on his brother’s name. On the outside, it looked like obedience, but in reality, it was deception. Yet again more deception. God saw what Onan was doing in secret. He wanted intimacy without obedience, pleasure without responsibility.

He was willing to use the law to gratify his desires, but not willing to carry out the responsibility that came with it. Because of this, the Lord took Onan's life as well.

Onan wanted pleasure without responsibility. He wanted the benefits, but not the obedience. He wanted intimacy, but not commitment. He was willing to take what pleased him, while refusing to carry the weight that came with it.

So, Onan's death leaves Tamar once again without a husband and without children. At that point, Judah steps in and makes her a promise, but it's a promise he never truly intends to keep. And in the next verses, the story begins to expose Judah's fear, his hypocrisy. **Genesis 38:11-23**

Seeing that her father-in-law was not keeping his promise, Tamar puts a plan into action. Just as Jacob, Judah's father, disguised himself to deceive his own father in order to obtain the blessing, Tamar also disguises herself to deceive her father-in-law and obtain what she was seeking. Judah also used Joseph's robe to deceive his father, Jacob, into believing that Joseph was dead.

She dressed herself like a prostitute, a shrine prostitute woman who were involved in acts of worship to the Canaanite gods.

Judah was so blinded by his desire that he didn't even ask her name, and he chose to hand over his seal of identification. In doing so, he exchanged his identity in order to satisfy his appetite.

This is how the enemy destroys many lives by getting people to trade their identity to satisfy their appetite.

So, let's define appetite:

Appetite is a strong desire that demands immediate satisfaction, often ignoring long-term consequences.

For Example:

When Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew, he chose to satisfy his hunger and treated his birthright as something of little value.

Brothers and sisters be careful, anything that asks you to trade your identity in Christ for temporary satisfaction is not from God. Our own desires blind us. They convince us that what feels good must be right, and that what God warns us about can be ignored.

Desire doesn't remove truth, it just makes us stop paying attention to it. The reality is that sooner or later we suffer the consequences of our decisions, and the truth is revealed just as it did with Judah. **Genesis 38:24-26**

Judah is quick to judge Tamar. His response reminds us how easy it is to condemn in others what we are unwilling to confront in ourselves. Scripture speaks directly to this kind of hypocrisy: **Romans 2:1**

But notice how the truth comes out. Tamar doesn't argue; she simply presents the evidence the seal, the cord, and the staff, Judah's identity. In that moment, Judah realizes he has been exposed and that the truth has been revealed. And he responds with these words: "She is more righteous than I am."

When Judah says, "She is more righteous than I," he's not saying Tamar did everything right. He's admitting that she was righter than he was because she was fighting for the justice, he refused to give her. What was hers by levirate law.

I believe this is the moment when Judah finally wakes up and recognizes his hypocrisy.

Many believe this was the moment of Judah's repentance, because from that point on, he never slept with Tamar again.

And, later in **Genesis 44**, we see Judah's transformation. The man who once sold his brother now offers himself as a slave to save one. This moment points us forward to Jesus. Judah is willing to take another's place, and Jesus would later do this perfectly, by giving His life for us. What we see here is the heart of the gospel: Substitution becomes the path to salvation.

But the story doesn't end there. What comes next shows us that even out of a broken situation, God is still at work bringing life, purpose, and redemption. **Genesis 38:27-30**

This part here shows us amazing about God, He took a son born out of an ungodly situation and placed him in the family line of the Messiah, even though neither Judah nor Tamar lived as examples of godliness.



Perez became the ancestor of Boaz, King David, and ultimately Jesus Christ. This means that from a story filled with failure, deception, and brokenness, God brought forth the line through which the Savior of the world would come. God did not excuse the sin, but He redeemed the story.

He took what was messy and painful and used it to accomplish His perfect plan. Jesus's lineage included the son of harlotry.

Listen: God redeeming our failure does not mean our choices don't matter. Judah's sin caused real damage broken families, death, pain, and shame. God redeemed the situation, but Judah still lived with the consequences of his sin.

Application:



Judah didn't fall all at once. It started when Judah left his father's house. Then he spent time with people who didn't follow God, lived among the Canaanites, and married a woman who didn't share his faith. Each choice seemed small, but little by little they pulled him away from God.

When a tire has a leak, it usually doesn't go flat all at once. A slow leak is easy to ignore, but if you keep driving, the damage keeps getting worse and the drive becomes difficult. In the same way, small compromises quietly drain our spiritual life until one day we realize how far we've drifted from God.

Listen, don't let your guard down. We lower our guard when we stop depending on God and start trusting our own judgment. When we stop praying before making decisions, when we no longer seek God's guidance in His Word, and instead follow what others are doing or what the world calls normal.


That's when the compromise begins. Be careful. Take time to examine your life. Ask yourself who is shaping your decisions and what is guiding your choices. Stay dependent on God.

Proverbs 3:5-6.



Judah wanted quick satisfaction, and at that moment, he was willing to give up his seal, cord, and staff, the very things that identified him. What seemed like a small decision in the moment ended up exposing him later.

This is how temptation works. It focuses our attention on what we want right now and hides the long-term cost.



“Sin always promises pleasure,
but it never shows the price tag”

Be careful. What satisfies you for a moment can cost you your peace, your testimony, and your walk with God later. **James 1:14-15**



When Judah finally said, “She is more righteous than I,” everything changed. He stopped defending himself and took responsibility for his sin. That moment of honest confession became the turning point in his life.

God did not excuse Judah’s sin, but He did restore him. From that point on, Judah’s direction changed, and God began to reshape his heart. Repentance didn’t erase the consequences, but it opened the door for healing, growth, and redemption, transformation to righteous living.

“Judah said, ‘She is more righteous than I.’ And that is exactly what we need to acknowledge today. Not that we are righteous, but that we are not.”

Only God is righteous One

Judah’s confession was not self-justification. It was surrender. He stopped defending and simply admitted the truth.

The good news is this:

We are not forgiven because of how good we are, or because we finally got things right. We stand forgiven before God because of Jesus’ righteousness, not our own.

The Bible teaches that our righteousness is never enough to make us right with God. But Jesus lived the life we could not live perfectly obedient and without sin and then He gave His life in our place. When we put our faith in Him, God credits Jesus’ righteousness to us. Our sin is placed on Christ, and His righteousness is placed on us. Just like **2 Corinthians 5:21** says.

So God doesn’t forgive us because we deserve it. He forgives us because Jesus does.