

Genesis 38

Costs and Consequences

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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In this chapter we're going to see some CRAZY stuff! Stuff that some of you had no idea was in the Bible. Stuff that there is no coloring sheet or Flannelgraph for in Sunday School. I guarantee you this, Veggie Tales never even thought about covering this chapter!

We just finished looking at the life of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, and now we have moved on to looking at the lives of his kids who will eventually become the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. Last week we saw how the nine oldest brothers got jealous of their younger brother Joseph because he was dad's favorite and sold him off into slavery.

Next week we will see how he resists temptations and sexual offers from his boss's wife down in Egypt.

First though, we have to make it through chapter 38 and look at the opposite example. We'll see how Judah, one of the older brothers, also heads away from the family and we'll see a world of difference between the boys. Joseph left home because he was forced to, Judah left home because he wanted to. Joseph walked in integrity and rose to be a respected man, Judah became a disgrace and raised disgraceful sons. Joseph was known for resisting sexual temptation, Judah's family is characterized by the problems they had with sex.

[1](#) It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. [2](#) And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her.

Every time we have seen someone in this family marry a local girl, we have seen things go wrong. Remember the lengths his great-grandpa Abraham went to in order to get a wife for Isaac? And then it was Isaac's wife Rebekah who asked that Judah's dad Jacob be sent back to her family to find a bride instead of marrying a local girl like his brother Esau. The women of Canaan are typically bad news!

Nowadays it seems to be that the good girls fall for the wrong guys, but back then it was the girls who were bringing things down. We'll see just how far down in a minute.

[3](#) So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. [4](#) She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. [5](#) And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him.

[6](#) Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. [7](#) But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him.

Er erred and God took him out.

Yes, it really says that – God killed him. Now, what really strikes me is the fact that this kind of thing doesn't happen more often. I have no problem with the fact that God did it then, what I don't understand is, *why just him?* Of course, it's not just him, there are a handful of deaths attributed directly to the Lord in Scripture, even in the New Testament, but still this kind of immediate termination by God is rare, which is odd to me.

After all, we all offend God – we all rebel against Him at times, and it is only His patience and mercy that allow us to live for perhaps 70 years, but sooner or later ... death comes to everyone. It's only a matter of when; it's not a question of "if."

And when it comes for some people we rejoice, right? Remember when they announced the death of Osama Bin Laden – people rejoiced, a wicked man has died. (I saw a pretty ironic Facebook post about it, "Tell people that Osama is dead and produce no witnesses or pictures and dispose of the body and people will still rejoice and dance in the streets. Tell people that Jesus rose from the dead, have over 500 witnesses and material evidence and people are still skeptical.")

So there are people that we rejoice to see die or be killed because we think of them as wicked men. But the question we have to ask is: *how wicked do you have to be in order to deserve to die?* Where is the line?

If you remember, last week we said that when Jesus draws the line, he draws it at His own feet – He's on one side, we're all on the other because His standard is holiness. It's not enough that we don't kill people, or that we don't steal, He wants our thoughts and our motives to be pure in all that we do as well. And if they aren't, if we don't hold to His standards, then He, just like any Father, has the right to discipline His disobedient and rebellious children.

So you see, the question isn't why did God do that to Er? The question is, why doesn't God do that to all of us? We are all wicked at some level, none of us are good enough for God, none of us have earned the right to say, "He shouldn't punish me." We all need Jesus to stand in our place, receive what we deserve, and give us His grace instead.

[8](#) And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother." [9](#) **But Onan knew that the heir would not be his;** and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. [10](#) And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; **therefore** He killed him also.

OK, what's going on here? Well, back in these days, this was a common practice – if a man married, and then died before he and his wife had any children, it was the responsibility of the next available brother, if he had any, to take the widow as his wife and have children by her who would then be able to take care of their mom when they grew up. Those kids

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would then also receive their dad's inheritance, so the widow was taken care of and his family name was carried on.

It kind of makes you concerned about who your older brothers are showing interest in, huh?

Well, Onan didn't want to do any of that – he wasn't interested in helping out his brother's widow or his brother's legacy. Besides, if his older brother never had any children, then he would inherit all of his brother's stuff. Why do something for someone else when you can just have it all for yourself? Well, God saw his heart in all of this and struck him dead too.

So we have here another example of the importance of the heart – what are your motives?

You see, this section, with God killing Onan, is not about WHAT Onan did, it's about WHY he did it. The focus isn't on his action, but on his motive.

People have tried to use this passage to forbid birth control and all kinds of other sexual activity, but the point here, once again, is not WHAT Onan did, but WHY he did it “lest he should give an heir to his brother” (vs 9). If God wanted to use a story like this to prohibit birth control, He could have very simply struck dead a happily married man who was doing this with his consenting wife.

It's my conviction that God *does* allow us to use birth control. God Himself is the Creator – He created for six days, and then He stopped. He could have kept on creating and creating, but He stopped, He said “that's enough” and He said it was “very good.” So, I think it's alright for us to stop creating too – and, after all, at some point everyone does anyway.

When you consider birth control, there are two issues you have to address: motive and method. First, let's talk about motive – life without kids is much easier than life with kids. Life with two kids is easier than life with three kids. You have to constantly check your heart and ask, why are we putting off having kids, or why are we waiting to have more? I'm not here to check your answer, I'm just telling you, you need to be asking the question, because it's always easier to keep trucking with the status quo than to take the next step to something that will be harder to do.

So there's motive, and that is always the most important, but then there is method – and this is a much more detailed issue, (one that I have been working on writing about for a while now and hope to have something for you all next week), but once you have right motives, you have to check what *method* you are using because you get into some serious bio-ethical questions with some forms of birth control and how they work. The bottom line is, you want to make sure you're preventing fertilization from occurring, not preventing implantation of a viable egg.

That's all I'm going to say about that from the pulpit, but if you have more questions, please feel free to come up to me afterward and we can discuss it more offline.

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One last thing, no matter where you come down on your personal convictions on this issue, we need to remember to be charitable with our brothers and sisters in Christ and not become divisive over this emotionally charged issue.

[11](#) Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

[12](#) Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. [13](#) And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." (NOTE: Sheep shearing time was always a time for parties and feasts.) [14](#) So she took off her widow's garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which *was* on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife. [15](#) When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, because she had covered her face. [16](#) Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she *was* his daughter-in-law. So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

[17](#) And he said, "I will send a young goat from the flock."

So she said, "Will you give *me* a pledge till you send *it*?"

[18](#) Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?"

So she said, "Your signet and cord, and your staff that *is* in your hand." Then he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. [19](#) So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood.

So, Tamar figures she's going to take matters into her own hands. She dresses up like a temple prostitute and waits for her father-in-law to come. Now there are two things that are interesting here: first, that she would use this strategy, and second, that according to what she knew about Judah's character, she figured he would go for it. *Think about that* – would someone who was trying to entrap you think this approach would work? What is your reputation? What would someone have to do to draw you in?

Well, Judah goes for the bait – notice, he comes up to her, she doesn't strike up the conversation with him. He states what he's looking for and they begin to negotiate, to establish their contract – to define their terms. Here's the basic question they both have to answer: what's this worth to me? Judah has to answer that, but so does Tamar. They're both going to give something in order to get something so, *is it worth it?*

And what do they settle on? A young goat. That's what this experience, this few minutes of their day, will be worth to them.

It is amazing to me the way we de-value sex.

Remember, all through Genesis we have been looking at sexual encounters done right and done wrong. We've seen that God gave us sex as a method of reproduction and He made it

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an enjoyable experience as a gift of grace to us. It is the most intimate experience you can have with another human being, and for that reason, when it is done right, throughout Genesis sex between a man and his wife is referred to as his “knowing” her, having a deep, intimate, personal knowledge of your spouse that is not shared by ANYONE else on the planet – not their siblings, not their parents, not their best friend – this is ONLY for one man and one woman joined together ‘til death do they part.

Or...it’s worth nothing more than a young goat. Or a couple of drinks and a nice dinner. Or the words “I love you.” Or, or what? What is your price?

It’s been said that women use sex to get love, and that men use love to get sex; they’re both just engaged in a transaction, they’re both asking the questions, what do I have to give you to get what I want, and is the opportunity worth that cost to me?

But, here’s what really blows my mind – this really isn’t about sex. It’s about something deeper. There is something deeper inside you, more than just skin deep, that is driving this transaction – it’s your soul.

Tamar and Judah are both trying to satisfy a longing they have deep inside and they’re using their skin to try and satisfy it. Judah’s trying to satisfy that longing with sex right now, but he’ll try to satisfy it with alcohol at another time, or with food, he’ll try to satisfy it with fortune, excitement or entertainment because it never goes away. This longing in your soul can only truly be satisfied when it is filled with the God who made it; until He comes in you’ll try just about anything to quench your desires.

If Tamar had known God as her father and trusted in Him to take care of her and watch over her, she would have never taken matters into her own hands. If Judah had known and trusted God he would have never put her in this position by withholding his son from her, maybe his other sons would still be alive, and he wouldn’t be out visiting prostitutes because he would be living for more than just hedonistic indulgences.

If, if, if...without God in our lives, without Him as the anchor of our soul, life loses value and we reduce the most precious, most intimate thing we have to simply another way to get a moment of pleasure.

Now, apparently Judah didn’t leave the house that morning thinking he was going to hire a prostitute, because he didn’t have any form of payment with him, but all of the sudden the opportunity and the environment seem right and he decides to go for it.

In a moment of lustful passion, this fully mature man gave up the signs of his identity and position for a few minutes with a woman he thinks he’s never met and will never see again.

Think with me in modern terms, we’ve seen Generals, Senators and Representatives, even US Presidents and presidential candidates give up the same things for a little sexual excitement – your heart is wicked and your desires are strong. You would think a man like

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the President of the United States would have the self-control to avoid sexual scandal, but our wicked hearts make **amazing** rationalizations as to why they should be served. So we make compromises, we allow indulgences, and watch where this ends up:

[20](#) And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her. [21](#) Then he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot who *was* openly by the roadside?" And they said, "There was no harlot in this *place*."

[22](#) So he returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this *place*."

[23](#) Then Judah said, "Let her take *them* for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her."

Judah tries to send payment for his little tryst, and the woman can't be found. Now, it's interesting to note that he suddenly found a little dignity and didn't want to go back himself, he just sends his friend. But when he can't find her, Judah says, "fine, let her keep my stuff, I tried to pay her" now he's the model of integrity and promise keeping, right?

[24](#) And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she *is* with child by harlotry." So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"

It's amazing how bad my sin looks on you and forgiving I am of myself.

This reminds me of David after his sin with Bathsheba, you remember the prophet Nathan went to him and told him the story of a rich man who took his neighbor's only lamb by force and killed it to offer a meal to his guest. And when Nathan told David the story he came down with this harsh judgment on the man who would do such a thing and then Nathan said, "you're the man! You took Uriah's only wife and had an affair with her." And David knew he was busted.

You see we have this tendency to judge others harshly and to go lightly on ourselves because we know all the excuses we have made. But when God looks at us, He doesn't accept any of those excuses – He issues the heavy judgments, but He is right in doing so, because He is perfect.

[25](#) When she *was* brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these belong, I *am* with child." And she said, "Please determine whose these *are*—the signet and cord, and staff."

[26](#) So Judah acknowledged *them* and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he never knew her again.

[27](#) Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb.

[28](#) And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." [29](#) Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said,

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“How did you break through? *This breach be upon you!*” Therefore his name was called Perez. [30](#) Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

Now why is all of this in the Bible? For two reasons, to show us how bad we are, and to show us how great God is. We are all in desperate need of grace, and fortunately it is available in Christ.

Turn with me to Matthew chapter 1 and I'll show you something amazing:

[1](#) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:
[2](#) Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. [3](#) Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram.

Judah, Tamar, and the boys wind up in the genealogy of Jesus.

In other words, there is hope for the ‘worst’ of us – there is no sin Jesus can’t forgive.

This kind of sexually related sin might not be what you struggle with, or maybe it is, but for all of us, there is something – we are using our lives, our flesh, our resources, our selves, to try to accomplish our desires. We all enter into transactions – what do I have to give in order to get what I want?

What we need to do is surrender everything to the God who made us and receive everything from Him in return, to stop trying to satisfy our hungers on our own and allow Him to sustain us.

You need to come to Him and you need to ask for forgiveness because sooner or later you will fall into one of two camps – those who have been struck dead in judgment or those who are included in the line of Jesus.

And if you are struggling with something right now, you need to ask Him for help. He doesn’t leave you alone to sort things out by yourself. Yes, He has high expectations of you, but He also freely offers to you everything He has.

As we saw last week, you need to be washed clean by Him, and kept clean by Him. Let’s pray.