

Certificate: PG

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 38. As you know, we're continuing our study in the life of Joseph, but this chapter is part of the life of Joseph, and we'll find out why as we go through it.

So Genesis 38, and we'll just read again at verse 1. It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adulamite whose name was Kira. It happened at that time. You know, there are some chapters in the Bible that should come with a parental guidance certificate, and this chapter would be one of them. Because as we said to the children, there are some films with the certificate rating U for universal. And when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's a message with a certificate rating U for universal. The gospel is a universal message. It's good news for everyone and anyone without exception. The gospel is a universal message for whosoever. Whosoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. It's a universal message. Regardless of who we are, where we're from, what we've done, how old we are, the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. It comes with the certificate U for universal. It's a universal offer. It's an open invitation to you this morning to come to Jesus. But there are some chapters in the Bible that need a higher certificate rating than others.

They need a parental guidance certificate. They need a certificate PG. And this chapter certainly needs a certificate PG rating. It needs what you would say a parental advisory notice that some material in this chapter may need some explanation from parents. And you know, I have to be honest, and I'll be very honest with you. It was very tempting just to skip over this chapter. And I wrestled in my mind for a few days thinking, well, will I or won't I? Not only because it contains very sensitive topics to talk about, but also because Joseph doesn't actually feature in this chapter. When we concluded chapter 37, last Lord's Day, Joseph, we saw he was being sold into slavery by his siblings. But then as we turn over the page into chapter 38, you know, we'd expect to see what happened next in Joseph's life.

But instead, we're given this chapter, which has nothing to do with Joseph. And we don't actually find out what happened in Joseph's life until we come to chapter 39. So God willing, that'll be next Lord's Day. But it obviously leaves us with a question, well, why is chapter 38 plonked right in the middle of the story of Joseph? And why is it so graphic? Well, as we said before, Joseph isn't the main character in the story of Joseph. God is, because God is the author of the story. He's the director in the drama. He has written the story. We might not understand the story line. We might not foresee all the twists and the turns that are written in the narrative, but God does. And as we shall understand, God is using it all for our good and ultimately for his own glory. And so I'd like us just to consider this chapter this morning, and I want us to think about it under three headings. Three headings, a miserable marriage, a messy mistake, and a marvelous Messiah. A miserable marriage, a messy mistake, and a marvelous Messiah. So first of all, a miserable marriage. A miserable marriage.

We'll read again in verse one. It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adulamite whose name was Kira. Now, I don't know about you, but when I first read Genesis 38, when I first became a Christian, I thought to myself, why on earth is this chapter in the Bible? Could they not have just skipped over this bit or left out some of the graphic details?

[4 : 41] But as you know, this is God's inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word. And as Paul reminded young Timothy in 2 Timothy, he said, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and it's profitable.

It's profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that as men and women of God, we may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Which means that Genesis 38 is in the Bible, and it's part of the story of Joseph, because God wanted it there. God wanted it there, and God has something to say to us in this chapter about his perfect plan, path and purpose in the story of redemption. But you know, when you read through this chapter, you're immediately confronted with the fact that there's nothing new under the sun. Our TV soaps and our TV screens, they all think that they're so current with all their storylines, where they're promoting the latest feelings and fads and fashions of the day. But the truth is, they're centuries behind the Bible. And their storylines, they aren't even a patch on the Bible. And I say that because it's all here in the book of Genesis. It's all here in the book of beginnings. Whether it's lust or sex or murder or rape or homosexuality, polygamy, slavery, racism, lies, deception, incest, prostitution, genocide, gambling, drinking, or drunkenness, you need to look no further than the Bible. Because it's all here in the book of Genesis, in the book of beginnings. And it's all here so that we never think that the Bible is all about saints. No, the Bible is a book about sinners.

[6:37] Sinners in need of a Savior. And that's the story of our lives too. We are sinners in need of a Savior. We are sinners in need of a Savior. Now, as we turn to Genesis chapter 38, the opening verse reveals three phrases which indicate that what this chapter is going to tell us is not going to be good.

Three phrases. We read them in verse 1. It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adolamite whose name was Kira. Three phrases that tell us that something bad is going to happen in this chapter.

The first phrase is, it happened. Right at the beginning of the verse. It happened. It's the same phrase that was used to describe the sins of King David when he committed adultery, lies, and murder. We're told that when it records David's life, and then it happened. The second phrase is that Judah went down, which was more than a geographical descent. It was a spiritual and moral descent. That's what it's talking about when it says Judah went down. And then the third phrase is, he turned aside, which immediately highlights that Judah was about to deviate and divert his attention from the path of righteousness. So he was going to turn away from the path of righteousness to a path away from the Lord. And that's what he did because Judah married the wrong person. Now we don't know Judah's frame of mind at the time, but it seems that what he did was an impulsive move. And it was probably fueled by the fact that it was all his idea to sell his younger brother Joseph into slavery and then lie about it to his father. And inevitably this lie among the brothers, it would have put a massive strain upon the family, especially to try and keep this lie a secret. And maybe this colorful chapter in Genesis 38, this chapter about Judah's life, it was Judah looking for a distraction to take away from all that was going on at home. Because as you know, that's often what happens when people try to distract themselves or numb themselves from the reality of life. They turn to different things like gambling or sex or alcohol or drugs. And for Judah, he turned aside, as we're told, to a certain idolatrous land of Canaanite. So with this Canaanite community in Adullam, we're told that Judah saw and took the daughter of a Canaanite woman. We're not even told her name. All we know that her mother was called Shua. And we're told that Judah saw and took her. Judah saw and took her. Judah lusted after this young woman. He slept with her, got her pregnant all before marriage. And because of this, Judah, in the day that they were living in, Judah would have had to do the honorable thing and marry this young woman. But it was a miserable marriage because he didn't marry in the Lord. His newfound wife was an idolater. She didn't worship the Lord. She was a Canaanite. She wasn't part of the covenant worship of God. She wasn't from the tribe of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But it was also a miserable marriage because as a covenant child, Judah rejected and refused to follow the Lord. You know, like his brothers, Judah had been brought up as a covenant child. He had been brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. You could say that he had been brought up in a Christian home with Christian values and family worship. But when Judah grew up and when he went to live among the Canaanites, instead of challenging their worldview, he conformed to it. Judah conformed to the world. And when his children were born, when he had his own family, he didn't teach them to follow the Lord like he had been taught. He didn't bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord like he had been brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. And because of that, because he didn't teach his children, it had an impact upon his whole family. And you know, you read the passage and it's a reminder to us of the importance of covenant children and the importance of parents and their covenant responsibility. Because, well, our

covenant responsibility, it's evidenced by baptism. But baptism doesn't save our children.

[11 : 38] No, we baptize our children because our covenant responsibility, while our children live under our roof, is to bring them up to love, look, and lean upon Jesus. Of course, once they leave home, we don't stop praying for them. But our children are accountable for their own actions when they leave home. And for Judah, his actions of sin ended in sorrow. His actions of sin ended in sorrow because we read that Judah had three sons with this unnamed wife. They were called Eir, Onan, and Shelah.

And as a hands-on dad, we read that Judah chose for his son Eir, not an Israelite woman who worshipped the Lord, but an idolatrous Canaanite woman called Tamar. And because he was never taught to follow the Lord like his father had been taught, Eir, we're told, he was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death. We don't know the circumstances about that, but we're told that Judah's firstborn son died because of his sin. For the wages of sin is death. But then we read some very graphic verses, which are in verses 8 to 10. Look at verse 8.

Then Judah said to Onan, Go into your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother. But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went into his brother's wife, he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. Now, this is the only time I'm thankful that there's no one in church when reading these verses. But, you know, when Judah asked his son Onan to perform the duty of a brother-in-law to Tamar, Onan told his father that he would, but he was lying. And he would have claimed to his father that Tamar, well, she's unable to conceive. That's why we're not having any children. Now, it might seem strange to us for a woman to marry her brother-in-law, but it was actually very common in that day that if a man died before he and his wife were able to have a son, an heir, then it would be the responsibility of the brother-in-law to father a son with his brother's widow. And it was all to ensure that the birthright from the father passed on to the oldest son. So, heir, he was the firstborn son, and therefore the birthright was his. But when heir died and he left no male heir to the father's inheritance, the second son, Onan, he saw the opportunity to claim the birthright and make it his own. He wanted the inheritance for himself.

And as we read, Onan, he slept with Tamar, but he used his own form of birth control to avoid getting Tamar pregnant. Now, these verses, they've often raised some questions about contraception. But do I find what Liam Golliger said in his book? It's a brilliant book, Liam Golliger's book, and I'd encourage you to read it. What he says about these verses, it's very, very helpful. He says, This incident with Onan tells us nothing about whether it is right or not for a Christian couple to use contraception. The issue here is quite specific and cultural. It is not commented on in Scripture, nor made a rule. Couples have to use their own prayerful judgment in this area, and it would be foolish and quite wrong to legislate on this matter. And I find those words are very, very helpful. But when Onan, when he used his own form of contraception, he disobeyed his father, he dishonored the Lord, and the result was he died. Which ought to be another reminder to us that even the most personal and private of sins, they can never be hidden from the sight of the Lord.

[15 : 59] Even the most personal and private sins can never be hidden from the sight of the Lord. But now we see that Tamar, she has been left a widow for a second time. And Judah's third son, Shelah, he's now, he's too young to get married by this point. But instead of looking after his daughter-in-law, which was actually Judah's responsibility, Judah sends Tamar back to her father's house, he sends Tamar back with the empty promise that when his eldest son Shelah, when his youngest son Shelah, when he is old enough, she'll get married to him. But with two sons dead, Judah was afraid that Tamar was becoming a bit of bad luck. And so he tried to push Tamar out of the family picture altogether in the hope that Tamar would somehow disappear out of sight and out of mind. And the whole thing had been a miserable marriage. But it was only going to get worse when Judah made a messy mistake. That's what we see secondly, a messy mistake. So a miserable marriage and then a messy mistake. A messy mistake. Look at verse 12. It says,

In the course of time, the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheep shearer, he and his friend Kira the Adulamite. And when Tamar was told, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep, she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enayim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shela was grown up and she had not been given to him in marriage.

Now the opening 11 verses of Genesis 38, they cover a period of about 20 years. And needless to say, through all the sins and the sorrows of Judah's family, the Lord was speaking to Judah. But Judah wasn't listening. Even his miserable marriage, it had ended in sorrow with his wife dying. But that didn't stop Judah continuing this downward direction away from the Lord. Because we read that Judah and his drinking buddy, Kira, they went to Timnah to shear sheep. Now as all crofters know, shearing sheep, it isn't a holiday. It's hard work. But going to Timnah, going to Timnah to shear sheep was not only an opportunity to work hard, it was also an opportunity to play hard. Because back then, sheep shearing was a lively event involving lots of alcohol. And so when Judah went up to Timnah, he went to work hard during the day and play hard during the night. It's like many people do or did before the pandemic. They would work hard during the week, Monday to Friday, and then on Friday night, they'd let off steam all weekend, playing hard with sex or gambling or drugs or alcohol. And we see it all the time. It's all around us.

And you know, on that point, my friend, you know, let's never, and I hope I never come across like that, let's never take a holier-than-thou attitude towards the Judahs in our community, or even the Judahs in our own family. Because, you know, if it wasn't for the grace of God, we would be there ourselves.

If it wasn't for the grace of God, I would never be in this pulpit. And so let's never forget, therefore, but by the grace of God, go I. Whenever you see a Judah following the pleasures of this world, my Christian friend, always remember, therefore, but by the grace of God, go I.

[19:59] But you know, what happened here in this chapter was that Tamar, who was now twice a widow, unable to remarry outside Judah's family, she took things into her own hands by seeking redemption for herself, because she knew that Judah had no intention of fulfilling his promise to her. And when Tamar heard that Judah was going up to Timnah to shear sheep, she knew what that meant. Because we're told that Tamar, she immediately changed out of her widow's garments and dressed up like a prostitute.

And like it was maybe in the past, the recent past, where widows would often be distinguished by dressing in black. Widows in ancient Israel would wear particular widow's garments to highlight their loss and their bereavement. But when Tamar changed her identity from a widow to a prostitute, she went, or she put on colorful clothing, and she also put a veil over her face. And the veil was part of the prostitutes' garments, not only to hide their identity, but also to give this seductive element of mystery. And prostitutes, they would often wait for their clients at the entrance gate to a town or a city, which is where Judah saw Tamar. Now, the name Tamar, it means palm tree. It's a word that's also found in Song of Solomon, when Solomon is describing his beautiful bride. He talks about her figure.

And so, the word Tamar, it suggests that she was a woman with a beautiful figure. She was an attractive young woman. And the way she dressed certainly attracted the attention of this man, Judah.

But, you know, it ought to be a reminder to us that we have to watch how we dress. We have to watch how we dress. You know, in the New Testament, the Bible teaches us that Christians should dress decently and modestly, not sparsely, skimpily, or scantily. But as you know, in the day and generation we live in, everything is sexualized.

We see it all around us. And everybody says, well, sex sells. And people who are sparsely, skimpily, or scantily dressed, it attracts attention. Whether it's in the realm of TV, or music, or sport, or media, or clothing, whatever it is, sex sells. Even in advertising, they use sex to sell products from, you could say, perfume to paint, from detergents to diet Coke. Everything is sexualized. And sadly, for many people, that's their example. That's who they want to imitate and emulate. But, you know, in such a sexualized world, we need to remember that as Christians, the Bible teaches us not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. And how is our mind renewed? By looking at Jesus.

[23:06] And the Bible says we're to present our bodies, not as sexual objects, but as living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable to God. So, we need to think about the way we dress. But, you know, that's not what was happening here in this passage with Judah and Tamar. Because when Judah came along the road to Timnah, after working hard and playing hard, he had been drinking, he met this woman, Tamar, thinking that she was a prostitute. And then we read in verse 15, when Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her at the roadside and said, come, let me come into you.

For he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, what will you give me that you may come into me? He answered, I will send you a young goat from the flock. And she said, if you give me a pledge until you send it. He said, what pledge shall I give you? She replied, your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand. So, he gave them to her. And he went into her. And she conceived by him. You know, in Tamar's mind, Judah took the bait and fell for it. And Judah was so drunk and he was so overcome with lust that Tamar even managed to persuade Judah to give her all his credit cards.

That's what Judah gave Tamar when he handed over his personal seal and the cord that was, which was carried, which carried the seal and also his staff of authority. Judah gave it all to Tamar in the temptation. And he, you know, he effectively handed over his wallet for a moment of pleasure. And because of, because our actions always have consequences, that moment of pleasure, it was going to cause pain to others. Then we read through the narrative, in the morning when Judah sobered up, he went looking for his prostitute to try and get what was his wallet. He tried to get his wallet back, but he couldn't find her. She had disappeared. But to save any embarrassment, Judah didn't want to pursue it any further. So, he let it go. Then we read that three months later, after her 12-week scan, the community begins to hear that Tamar, the widow of Judah's sons, she has been immoral because she's pregnant. And, you know, this would have been a massive scandal because Tamar, she wasn't to marry again. She wasn't to marry anyone except someone in Judah's family. The only person she could really marry was Shelah, Judah's youngest son. But then look at verse 24. About three months later, Judah was told, Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality. And Judah said, bring her out and let her be burned. Bring her out and let her be burned. Judah immediately, he takes the high ground of hypocrisy. And he wants to condemn his dirty daughter-in-law and burn her at the stake.

But Tamar, cleverly and cunningly, she says in verse 25, as she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, by the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant. And she said, please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff. Then Judah identified them and said, she is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah, and he did not know her again. You know, one commentator says that when Tamar played her trump card, Judah's case against her collapsed.

[26 : 55] You know, Judah's confession that Tamar was righteous and he unrighteous, Judah's confession was the first step in the transformation of this man's life. It was the first step. Because that's the way it always is with sin. Transformation takes place with confession of sin. Transformation takes place when we confess our sin. That's the promise of the Bible. If we confess our sin, whatever sin that may be, if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. All because the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

And you know, this is what brings us thirdly and finally to the marvelous Messiah. He is able to cleanse us from all our sin. And so we've seen a miserable marriage, a messy mistake, and lastly, a marvelous Messiah. A marvelous Messiah. Look at verse 27.

When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put out a hand and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, this one came out first. But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, what a breach you have made for yourself. Therefore his name was called Perez, which means breach.

Afterward, his brother came out with a scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah. You know, as a result of this lustful affair with Judah, Tamar gave birth to twins. And what's remarkable is that even though Judah had a miserable marriage and he made a messy mistake, the wonderful thing is the Lord was still sovereignly working in this man's life. Judah may have been very far away from the Lord spiritually, but the Lord was still speaking to Judah. And the Lord was still working in his circumstances and his situation. The Lord was reminding Judah in the misery and in the mess, he was reminding him that he's a marvelous Messiah. And you know, although this passage is a bit graphic, you know, the great thing is it doesn't hide any sins or skeletons in the closet. And you know, that's what I love about the Bible. Nothing is sugar-coated or covered up. Everything is open and honest the way it should be. And that's because, as we said, the Bible is not about saints. The Bible is all about sinners, sinners who need a Savior.

And this morning we're being reminded in this chapter that as sinners, no one is beyond hope. No one is beyond redemption. No one is unsavable. No one is too far gone. My friend, you might be, you might have things in your past or in your present that you're not proud of. You might have misery or mistakes or mess that has caused you a lot of pain or pain to others around you. But you know, the message of the gospel, you really want to understand. Yes. But you can tell us something that really is a message that is a message of rejection. It's a message of reconciliation.

[30 : 11] The message of the gospel is not a message of condemnation. It's a message of commendation. For Jesus Christ is being commended to you in the gospel as the marvelous Messiah that He is.

and you know the wonderful thing is the lord is able to work in and through our messy mistakes and he's able to work by his grace for our good and to his glory the lord is able to work in our messy mistakes by his grace for our good and to his glory and that's what we see in this family the family of judah now the line and lineage of judah you know tamar she had twins twins that weren't part of judah's plan and purpose but they were part of god's plan and purpose a perfect plan and a perfect purpose in fact they were part of god's promise because tamar this woman in this chapter she was part of the line and lineage of grace tamar is a descendant of the marvelous messiah jesus christ she's an ancestor of jesus she's a relative of jesus and tamar is mentioned this is the wonderful thing about the bible tamar is mentioned in the genealogy of jesus in the opening chapter of matthew's gospel and when you read it for yourself what's amazing is that there are five women mentioned in that line and lineage of grace in that in the day when matthew wrote his gospel it was only men who were usually mentioned in a family tree but in the family tree of jesus there are five women in that line and lineage of grace and they're all unlikely and unexpected characters because there's tamar as we saw she posed as a prostitute there's rahab who was a prostitute there's ruth who was a pagan from moab there's bathsheba who was an adulteress and there's mary the mother of jesus who was wrongly regarded as immoral when she conceived of the holy spirit and yet these five women these unlikely and unexpected characters they're all in this line and lineage of grace they're all descendants of jesus they're all in the family of jesus and they all show us that our jesus is a marvelous messiah our jesus is a marvelous messiah and you know my friend although this is a graphic chapter what should come out of this chapter is that it's a gracious chapter it's a gracious chapter because it emphasizes to us that we have a gracious god and we have a marvelous messiah in jesus christ we have a gracious god and a marvelous messiah who takes the most unexpected and unlikely characters just like me and you he takes sinners and he comes to us in our misery in our mistakes and in our mess and he brings us into his family that's the wonder of the gospel our gracious god and our marvelous messiah jesus christ he takes unexpected and unlikely characters and he finds us in our misery mistakes and our mess and he cleanses us and he washes us and he forgives us and he brings us into his family and he says you are a son and you are a daughter of the king and so genesis 38 i'm glad we didn't skip over it it might need some parental guidance but i want you to leave this chapter this morning saying with a psalmist and looking at the wonderful story of redemption saying this is the doing of the lord and marvelous in our eyes well may the lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray together oh lord our gracious god we give thanks to thee for thy word thy word that is so relevant to our lives and forgive us lord for neglecting it for the times that we put it aside and think that it can't speak into the 21st century and yet thy word is more relevant than tomorrow's newspaper because it speaks of the 21st century and that it can't speak to us and it can't speak to us and we pray that we would listen that we would learn and that we'll cause us to look not to ourselves or to others but ever to jesus our marvelous messiah the author and the finisher of our faith oh lord teach us we pray teach us to be like jesus to follow in his footsteps to live lives that bring glory to his name oh go before us lord we pray bless us in this lord's day help us to rest in it to wait patiently upon thee and to seek first the kingdom of god and his righteousness cleanse us we ask for we ask it in jesus name and for his sake amen well we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing to god's praise in psalm 118 psalm 118 it's in the scottish psalter and we're singing from verse 17 down to the verse marked 23 psalm 118 it was martin luther's favorite psalm the great reformer and he had in his study the words of verse 17 on a plaque i shall not die but live and shall the works of god discover the lord hath me chastised so but not to death given over and we'll sing on down to the verse marked 23 of psalm 118 to god's praise i shall not die but live and shall the works of god discover the lord hath me just i said than will my end but live in to the festival in hybrid

I enter into Him as I the Lord will bless.

This is the King of God, my dear, the God of God, I enter Him.

[37 : 41] If I pray for the leader and have my safety be.

The stone is made and cornered soon, which fills their shipping skies.

This is the doing of the Lord, the Lord will bless you.

The Lord will bless you and the Lord will bless you. I will bless you and the Lord will bless you.

God bless you and the Lord will bless you. And you will bless you and the Lord will bless you and the Lord will bless you.