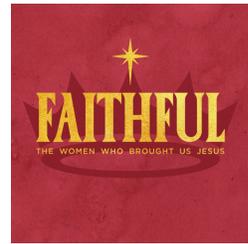


Faithful - Tamar – Blessing from tragedy.

Genesis 38:1-30

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



There are stories in the Bible that you wouldn't normally hear in Sunday school or tell your children. In other words, the Bible isn't always rated G. Sometimes, it is rated R. One of those stories is the story of Judah and Tamar. A desperate situation, a lack of faithfulness and righteousness, and utilitarian ethics all combine to create a pretty startling situation. Even more startling, Matthew reminds us of this situation when he describes the noble birth of Jesus. Why? Well, there is only one good reason, grace. Jesus is the King who came to save sinful humanity. Blessing would come from tragedy, and Matthew reminds us of that reality.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. - Matt. 1:1-11

Have you ever learned something about your history that deeply changed the perspective of your present? For better or worse, we all have things in our families that we just don't talk about. Sometimes we can look at our lives, past and present, and wonder if God can actually redeem ALL of it: The painful relationships, the massive mistakes, the blatant rebellion against God himself. The hurt and trauma that has been done to us or the egregious sins of others that we have taken the brunt of. The things that make our chests tighten with emotion and our throats choke back tears. What can God really do with all this mess? If He can redeem it, He truly is a miracle worker.

But that is who God is. Redemption is the overarching cry of all of Scripture, leading to its culmination in Jesus Christ's death on the cross, redeeming all of creation. Through him, God reconciled everything to himself.¹ And the good news for us today is that, **God can redeem every part of my story.**

¹ Excerpt from: Danielle Bartholic's blog post (11/25/22): www.ccames.org/blog

1. Advent – Jesus is on the way. (Matt. 1:1-11)

a. A season of intentional remembrance and looking forward... a paradox of postures.

- i. Literally meaning “coming” or “arrival,” this term refers to the coming of Jesus Christ to earth to provide salvation by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension.
 1. **We remember when God fulfilled his promise to send his son.**
- ii. Christians now anticipate a second advent when Christ will return to earth in bodily form to receive the church and to judge the nations.
 1. **We look forward in hope and expectancy for Jesus’ promised second coming.**
- iii. The term *Advent* also refers to a season of the church year during which the church prepares to commemorate Christ’s first coming to earth (Christmas).
 1. The Advent season encompasses the four Sundays prior to Christmas Day.²
 2. By the Middle Ages four Sundays had become the standard length of the Advent season. Since then, Advent has been considered to be the beginning of the church year.³

b. It is a season of increasing light.

- i. The Advent wreath has five candles. The candles represent:
 1. Hope
 2. Love
 3. Peace
 4. Joy
 5. The Messiah
- ii. Each week a new candle is lit, and with it, the light increases until on Christmas Eve, we light the final candle, the Messiah’s candle.
 1. As the light increases, we remember the moment the light of the world came into the world.

c. The genealogy of Mathew → The one who was long promised is here, and he belongs.

- i. Matthew took the opportunity to set forth more than a genealogical pedigree. He not only slipped in little asides, but structured the list of names in order to make vital points. **He thus transformed what might have been a dull recital into a thought-provoking introduction to his Gospel.**⁴
- ii. Why do both Matthew and Luke give a genealogy?
 1. In Luke, Jesus’ line runs from David through David’s son Nathan (see Luke 3:31), but Matthew’s record runs through David’s son Solomon (see 2 Sam. 5:14).
 2. **Luke traces the former, the actual line of Joseph; Matthew presents the latter, the way the line of David’s *kingly* descendants ultimately found itself falling on Joseph.**⁵
 - a. **In fact, this fulfilled prophecy.** The prophet Isaiah looked forward to a time when “a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse [David’s father]” (Isa. 11:1). That is, the tree representing the monarchy would be hacked down

² Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, [*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 7–8.

³ Fred A. Grissom and Steve Bond, [“Advent,”](#) ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 31.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 10.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 10.

- until only a stump remained, but from that apparently dead and ruined stump would spring a fresh “shoot” that would grow to become a solid tree.⁶
- iii. The *third* and most intriguing feature of the genealogy is the mention of four women: Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), and Bathsheba (“Uriah’s wife” 1:6). **Most Jewish genealogies did not include women.** More important, the choice of *these* particular women, instead of such great matriarchs as Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah, proves **Matthew was giving us something more than merely biological information.**⁷
1. Matthew’s main point → Jesus is the rightful King who came to save his people from their sins. (cf. 1:21)
 - a. ²¹ **She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**
 2. See the addendum for visual pictures of the Family lines of Jacob, Judah, and Jesus.

2. This should never have happened. (Gen. 38:8)

- a. **The Bible pulls back the curtain on real life. → This is an uncomfortable passage.**
- i. The first thing we need to acknowledge in this passage is that the lengths Tamar goes to should never have happened.
 1. We could easily look at Tamar and her actions and scold her. That is not how the original reader would have read or understood this story.
 2. We need to look at Judah and Onan hold them accountable for putting Tamar in a vulnerable situation. → **It was his job to take care of her, and he refused.**
 - ii. **What was Judah and Onan’s responsibility? → Kinsman Redeemer (v.8)**
 1. The fact that a single Hebrew word suffices for the phrase **perform the duty of a brother-in-law** (RSV) would confirm that this was a standard practice, even if there were no record of the law in Deuteronomy 25:5ff.
 - a. **The enormity of Onan’s sin is in its studied outrage against the family, against his brother’s widow and against his own body.**⁸
 2. Kinsman-redeemer (גֹּאֵל, *go’el*) was the most common form of redemption in the Old Testament. This kinsman-redeemer was a close male relative from the same clan. The closer the familial relation, the greater the obligation to redeem on behalf of the family member in need (Lev 25:25).
 - a. **Essentially, whoever could redeem a relative should, with the greater responsibility falling to nearer kin.**⁹
 - b. God put into place a practice that was designed to care for and protect the most vulnerable in Israel as a society.
 - i. This practice was to be a shining light of how life was far better and more livable under the rules and precepts of the God of Israel.
 - ii. Yes, life was still hard. → Poverty, injustice, and tragedy was still experienced. No, life was not a utopia.
 - iii. But, just as we saw in the Nehemiah series, God ordered his people to care about and for each other.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 11.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 12.

⁸ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 199.

⁹ Peter Lau, “Redemption,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

3. If Judah and Onan had obeyed God's precepts as Tamar's redeemers she would never of had to resort to the lengths of prostitution and extortion of Judah to secure her future. (cf. v.26)

b. God always tells the whole story.

- i. A few weeks ago we talked about how situationism and utilitarianism are never the ethical framework for Christians to employ. Instead, Christians are to employ what is called, deontological ethics.
 1. **Utilitarianism** - A theory of moral reasoning within teleological ethics that looks to the principle of utility, that is, the degree to which an act is helpful or harmful in the world as a whole, to determine the rightness or wrongness of an act.¹⁰ I.e., "The ends justify the means."
 2. **Situationalism** - Situation ethics teaches that in any given situation, the moral agent must seek to discern what in that circumstance would be the most loving course of action and then act accordingly.¹¹
 3. **Deontological ethics** – These are ethics that are not primarily concerned with the consequences or outcomes of an action (like utilitarianism and situationism). Instead, it is primarily concerned that the ethical action is governed by a rule.
 - a. **For a Christian, those rules are always the prescriptions of God.**
- ii. **A second temptation** – Once we understand that Judah and Onan shrugged off their responsibility and ignored a God-given prescription to care for Tamar, we can be tempted in our empathy for Tamar to excuse her sin.
 1. To excuse her sin would be to employ some version of utilitarianism and is to miss the larger point of the passage and the Bible as a whole.
- iii. **Instead of excusing sin, God tells us the whole story so that we are able to engage with it in both truth and compassion.**
 1. I.e., It is possible for us to engage this story with the truth of God's prescriptions and with the compassion of God's heart.
 2. **If we can do that in this passage, we can do that in our lives, with our children, our neighbors, and our relatives.**
- iv. Two things should stand out to us from this passage and as we remember the reality of Jesus' first advent (arrival).
 1. Tamar needed a redeemer. We need a redeemer. → Jesus is the perfect redeemer.
 2. Sin is never a good or sufficient solution the problems we face.

3. Sin is never a good solution.

- a. This passage interrupts the story of Joseph being sold into slavery and sent to Egypt.
 - i. Judah was brother to Joseph → But they did not have the same mom.
 1. **Remember** – Joseph was dad's favorite son from dad's favorite wife.
 - a. This is a major red flag!!
 - b. ³ **Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.** ⁴ **But when**

¹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 124.

¹¹ Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 109.

his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. (Gen. 37:3-4)

- ii. Judah's family line was in trouble –
 - 1. The sins and stratagems of these individuals, however, are of family import, and the story can only be appreciated in these terms. **The future hangs on their choices: the plot revolves round Tamar's right to be the mother of Judah's heir**, and her successive frustrations and eventual victory are its dominant concern.¹²
 - 2. Why is Judah's family line in trouble? → His sinful choices.
- b. **Judah's sin:** Don't take God's prescriptions for marriage seriously.
 - i. In verses 1, 2 there is haphazardness in Judah's steps towards marriage, similar to Samson's (Judg. 14:1ff.), **and his Canaanite wife is left unnamed**, like the latter's Philistine one: she is still known merely as Shua's daughter at the end of her story (12). Adullam, later to be famous for David's cave, was in the territory south or southwest of Jerusalem allotted after the conquest to Judah's tribe (cf. 2 Chr. 11:5, 7).¹³
 - ii. We see later on the corrupting influence that Judah has allowed to take root in his heart from this intermarriage to a Canaanite woman.
 - 1. **Important:** God's provision against interfaith marriage is not and was never about racial or ethnic exclusion. It was always about taking seriously the spiritual influences over his people. → This is something we saw in the Nehemiah series.
 - 2. **v. 12ff → Sheep shearing time... What's done at shearing time, stays there.**
 - a. **Sheep-shearing was a festive time (cf. 1 Sam. 25:4, 11, 36), when sexual temptation would be sharpened by the Canaanite cult, which encouraged ritual fornication as fertility magic.**
 - b. Such was the world into which Judah had married. The prophets (e.g. Hos. 4:14) report its corrupting power over Israel for generations to come.¹⁴
- c. **Er's sin:** We're not told what it was... but it was serious.
 - i. Remember, these were the son's of Jacob, the grandchildren of Isaac, and great-grandchildren of Abraham. → They were the people God had made his family line out of. They should have known better and acted according to the one they belonged to (God). → Yet, here they are, and this is the family line God will use to bring about Jesus, the Messiah!
 - 1. **If you thought God couldn't use you or your family... This passage is good news!**
 - a. This family was in a spiritual and physical crisis, how can we relate to that?
 - ii. The unspecified wickedness of Er, like the specific sin of Onan (cf. 9, 10) is recorded for its contribution to the succession crisis. **At the same time, it emphasizes the steep moral decline in the chosen family, which only the outstanding piety of Joseph would arrest for a while.**¹⁵
- d. **Onan's sin:** Refusal to do what was right by Tamar and the Lord.
 - i. As noted above in the notes on kinsman-redeemer, Onan's sin is grievous.

¹² Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 199.

¹³ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 199.

¹⁴ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 200.

¹⁵ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 199.

- ii. There were specific provisions in place to protect widows from social and economic vulnerabilities. → Onan's sin continues to put Tamar in a desperate situation.
 - 1. His sin wasn't just against Tamar, it was also against his family and his own body.
- e. **Tamar's sin:** We need to look at this with truth and compassion.
 - i. Again, what was done against Tamar was wrong and God makes no excuse for how she was treated.
 - 1. She was a victim because of the sins of Onan and Judah.
 - ii. Again, God tells us the whole story because he wants us to look at her story with both truth and compassion.
 - 1. If you read this story and your first reaction is to judge Tamar without judging Onan and Judah, God is inviting you to dial up your compassionate side.
 - 2. If you read this story and sympathize with Tamar so much that you excuse or justify her sin, God is inviting you to dial up your truth lens.
 - iii. **Why does God want us to look through both lenses (truth and compassion)?**
 - 1. Because when we learn to do that for this story, we learn to do that for our neighbors.
 - 2. As we grow in both truth and compassion, we grow in Christlikeness. (Jn. 1:16-17)
 - 3. **As we grow in truth and compassion, we grow to realize that hope doesn't hinge on me, it hinges on Jesus.**

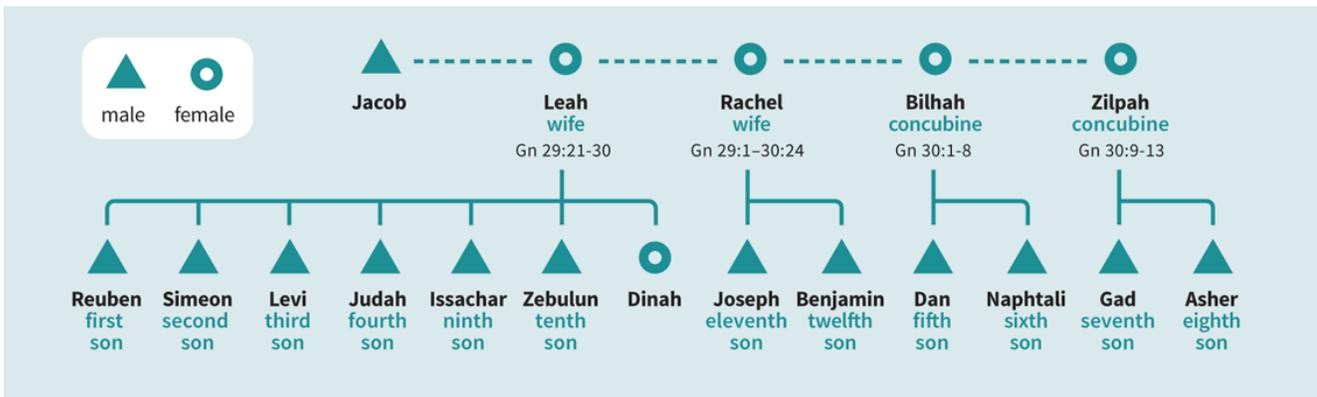
4. Hope doesn't hinge on me.

- a. **This passage is about redemption.** → Both the amazing power of God to redeem what is seemingly unredeemable and that Jesus is the true redeemer.
 - i. Each party in this passage takes their redemption/salvation into their own hands and it ends with disastrous consequences.
 - 1. **How can we relate to that reality? I.e., How have we tried to solve the dysfunction and brokenness of our lives through decisions and actions that don't line up with God's prescriptions?**
 - ii. **Another way of asking this question: If I don't take care of business... who will?**
 - 1. This comes to the point of faithfulness → We trust God and follow him into what is ahead because he has demonstrated himself trustworthy in the past.
 - 2. How many of us are living our lives and looking at our families as if the only they have for a healthy future is on my shoulders?
 - a. This is not inherently wrong. I.e., We shouldn't be cavalier with the health and security of our families.
 - b. But, it does misplace the priority and the ability. → I am not infinitely able to provide for my family, but God is more than sufficient.
 - c. **This continues to ask the question, where is my trust truly placed? → On Christ or on me?**
- b. **Jesus is the true redeemer.**
 - i. Isaiah 9: 6-7 states - ⁶ **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** ⁷ **Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.**

- ii. Thankfully hope for my family, neighbors, and myself doesn't hinge on me. Instead, God sent his Son to be the prince of peace for us.
 - 1. Shalom (peace) – This Hebrew concept is more than just the ceasing of conflict, it conveys the idea of being made whole. → Jesus is the prince who came to make us whole.
- c. **When the love and hope of God is the rudder of our lives, we are positioned to see seasons for what they are, seasons.**
 - i. **This helps us to endure faithfully in hard seasons.**
 - ii. **This helps us to remain humble in abundant seasons.**
 - 1. Paul said, “¹²I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:12-13)
 - iii. God promised to bring about man's redemption after the fall (Gen. 3:15), and he made good on that promise. He even used some of the most unlikely characters. That is good news for us!

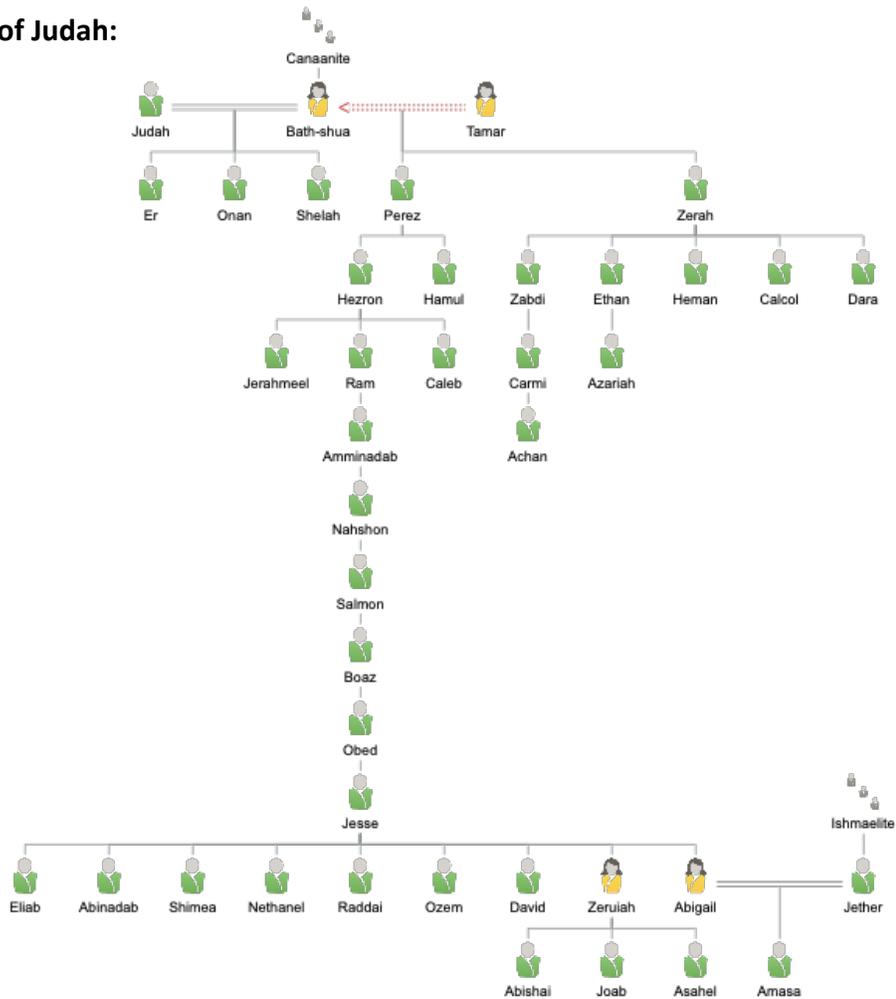
Addendum: Genealogical pictures of Jacob, Judah, and Jesus.

The family line of Jacob:



Judah to David (1 Chronicles 2:3-17)

The family line of Judah:



The family of Jesus from David:

Jesus' Family Tree According to Matthew (Matthew 1:1-17)

