

Gen. 38; Mt. 1:1-3; Tamar, the mother of Jesus I. The Rebellious Family II. A Surprising Breakthrough

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we begin our Advent series as we look at the women of Jesus' genealogy. As you may know, recording the names of women in your family tree was not standard practice in Israel- so the women listed do warrant careful attention. These 5 women give us a unique glimpse into Jesus family tree- their stories are full of dirt and grime to say the least. They truly show how a sinner becomes a saint. How all things are possible with God! It is noteworthy that Jesus is not ashamed of His history! These are the women that Jesus wants us to know- their lives form an important part of Jesus' own coming! As Genesis 3 promised- the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. These women will be chosen by God to carry on the line of the covenant- so that the promised seed would be born. Most families have a black sheep- one member that stands out from the rest and not always for the best reasons. But Jesus focusses and brings to light the black sheep of His family- so that we might marvel at God's grace! Although these women do not fit the mold for our idea of sacred history- they are each unique in their ability to highlight God's gracious salvation! Not only is Jesus unashamed to call us his brothers- He is not ashamed to call these women His mothers. Truly God's ways are wonderful, marvelous and mysterious. So today we see that Jesus saves a rebellious family by breaking into their lives. We begin our series with Tamar- perhaps the least known woman in our genealogy.

I. The Rebellious Family

We start by seeing the rebellious family and context into which Jesus' forefather is born. Our passage from Gen. 38 opens by saying- it happened at that time. Now what was the time- which historical events surround the Tamar episode? Well- as ch. 37 reveals- Joseph has been sold into slavery. But by whom? Who sold Joseph? Well- it was his brother- Judah! As 37:26 says- Judah tells his brothers to sell Joseph into bondage. In other words- it was Judah's fault – his idea- that brought about this forced slavery and captivity in Egypt that Joseph experienced. What kind of brother sells his own flesh and blood for a payday? What kind of family is this? It is a dark time in Israel! Well- things go from bad to worse. Not only does Judah mastermind the slavery of his brother and deception of his father- he continues in ch. 38:1 by cutting off all ties with his family. He moves away

from his brothers altogether- shunning the covenant people and he moves into the Canaanite camp. He marries a Canaanite woman- which never leads to good things. As Malachi 2 says- Judah profaned the sanctuary of the Lord and married the daughter of a foreign god. Turning his back on the LORD, Judah rebels and becomes one with the world. It would be like a present-day church member asking to have his membership in the church removed- to revokes his church membership and cuts all ties with the local congregation. So while living with his friend- Hirah- he comes to find a Canaanite wife as well in v. 3- and she gives birth to 3 sons. Judah marries an unbeliever- while living in the world as a covenant breaker. And this rebellion bears fruit in the next generation. Of his three sons- we find Er in v. 7- so wicked that God puts him to death. And again in v. 10- the second born son named Onan- is also put to death by the LORD. They are so rebellious that God kills them both! Such are Judah's sons. So Judah's sons are all dying- the line of Judah is tied up in his last son- Shelah. But Judah will not let Shelah get married- because he is afraid that Shelah will be as wicked as his brothers- and he will die as well. Tamar- his daughter in law- is viewed as a black widow- everyone who marries her is killed off- but what Judah does not confess is that it was the sin of his children that lead to their downfall- his own sin that puts them in midst of a idolatrous people. And in the end- Judah's wife dies as well. This story is starting to sound like the life of Naomi in the book of Ruth! What we find in this chapter is a rebellious son of Jacob. What will be one of the Tribes of Israel- of the biological children of Abraham to whom the covenant promises were given. But Judah has turned his back on his family and the LORD their God. He spends his days among the Canaanites- living like them and marrying one of them. His own sons so wicked that they are put to death. Going after the world- even visiting what he thinks is a shrine prostitute after his wife dies. And when his daughter in law becomes pregnant- he has every intention of killing her- refusing to have mercy. It is so perverse- this chapter almost needs an R rating- it is scandalous! And this is the line of Christ! If we could choose our family history- would we tell of these people? What we see here is that Israel and his sons needs a Savior! This chapter proves to us- the church needs to be saved! We share our nature with men like Judah! He is our forefather as well! Don't we often go along with the world- thinking or acting more like Judah than Jesus? We need to be saved from this lifestyle as

well! But there is good news- for Judah and for us! Not only does God have a plan for Joseph in Egypt- God has a plan for Judah and Tamar as well. A purpose that will not only bring about repentance- but will produce the line of the Savior! Sin is hard and stubborn- but grace will break through!

II. A Surprising Breakthrough

The turning point in our passage is when Judah goes down to what he thinks is a shrine prostitute- which would be a woman who has sex for hire at the temple of some pagan idol. But instead, he just happens to find Tamar and she just happens to conceive. By the mysterious work and intervention of God, the widow who is shut in a house is able to be with child. The Lord is working through her actions to bring about His good end. Now this action was a way to fulfill the Levirate Law- which Onan was unwilling to do. Although she uses deception to do it, Tamar was looking forward with hope. Now we do not know how much Tamar knew of the covenant and the need for the line of Judah to continue- we do find this remark made about her in 38:26- she is more righteous than I- Judah said. Judah states that Tamar was in the right- that she is blameless and her actions are upright. She is acting more like a child of God than I am- Judah says. Because of Tamar's actions, Judah's lineage is not brought to an end- his name and seed are not snuffed out. Indeed, Judah shows signs of repentance. He confesses his guilt and acknowledges his sin in keeping Shelah unmarried to Tamar. And from this point on, Judah starts to move back towards his own family and is restored in part to his father, Jacob's house. We know this because when the brothers need grain from Egypt- Judah is among Jacob's sons that go down in chapter 42.

Moving back to our saga concerning the pregnant Tamar, in the time of labor she is going to give birth to twins. With the story of Jacob and Esau in mind, we find that two sons will come forth. The first one puts out his hand- is marked with a cord as the oldest- and is then pushed aside by the youngest. This strange and unique birth gives us an indication that this birth- and one of these sons in particular- is going to be important. The first is named Zerah- meaning "rising light" or "dawn." So for Tamar- this son was sign of the light beginning to break and that the darkness was going to be dispelled. And the second son- who is actually the first fully born- get the

name “breacher” or Perez. It is almost like the boy Perez pushes his brother Zerah out of the way so that he-Perez- can be born first. Unusual- and as we will see- and very important since it will be Perez who is listed again in the book of Ruth Chapter 4- the genealogy of Perez ending in the birth of King David. In this birth- it is as if grace breaks into this world- his name meaning breakthrough or breach. In this account, all we can say is that God’s grace is strong enough to save the most obstinate person! Who but God can take Judah from where he is and place him in the lineage of Christ- by way of Perez the son of his daughter-in-law? God is able to take a rebellious, world-loving covenant breaker and turn him into a tender child of God. As the book of Genesis unfolds, we find this selfish, brother selling and self-gratifying man becoming a loving protector. As Genesis 44 will reveal- it was Judah who was willing to offer himself in the place of Benjamin! Judah would go into slavery to protect his brother and save his father from more heartache. It would be of Judah that Jacob would say in Gen. 49- to you Judah belongs to victory! Your brothers will bow down before you- your enemies cower before you- and the scepter will not depart from between your feet! In other words- we come to expect the King of Israel to come from his lineage! And this kingdom is established as Jesus is born of Judah through Perez his son- by way of Tamar his daughter-in-law. Jesus’ own birth was unexpected to say the least! And His work of saving is like the light breaking into a dark world! Oh come- Immanuel- and dispel the shadows of the night!

To conclude, our passage reveals that grace is greater than sin- Jesus Christ is able to soften the most rebellious heart. His hand is able to use and mold every heart! He is not limited to saving the upright, moral people- He can and has changed and restored the most obstinate and worldly! Jesus saves a rebellious family by breaking into their lives. There is hope for the covenant breakers and rebels of this world- because Jesus is strong enough to break into the darkest hearts and cause His light to shine upon the most idolatrous lands! Praise God that grace breaks into this fallen world- and that the salvation that is promised to Abraham has come! The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has come- through the saga of Tamar and Perez- His is the kingdom and power- His is the light that can break forth in the darkest night!