

48. The perfect patience of God's mercy (2007)

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[0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning. You'll find it in the book of Genesis. If you have one of our visitors' Bibles, I think that's page 32. Whatever Bible you have, it's the very first book of the Bible right at the beginning.

And today we reach Genesis chapter 38. And we're going to read the whole of this chapter. Although, prepare yourself because perhaps it's not quite what you expected at church on a Sunday morning.

It begins immediately following the events we looked at last week in Genesis 37 where Joseph's brothers, led by Judah, sold him into slavery, into Egypt, and therefore into almost certain death.

And it happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adulamite whose name was Hira. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua.

He took her and went into her and she conceived and bore a son and he called him Ur. She conceived again and bore a son and she called his name Onan.

[1 : 1 7] Yet again she bore a son and she called his name Shela. Judah was in Chezeb when she bore him. And Judah took a wife for Ur, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.

But Ur, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord and the Lord put him to death. Then Judah said to Onan, Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her.

That is to take her as a wife of his own 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. What he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord.

And he put him to death also. Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law, Remain a widow in your father's house till Shela, my son, grows up.

[2 : 2 0] The implication being that he would then take her to wife. But Judah feared that he would die like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father's house.

In the course of time, the wife of Judah, Shura's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheep shearers. He and his friend, Hira 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 Enim, 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. 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'll send you a young goat from the flock.

[3 : 27] 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, that is your personal seal, and your staff that is in your hand, which would have had his name on it.

So he gave them to her and went into her. And she conceived by him. Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil, she put on the garments of her widowhood.

When Judah sent the young goat by his friend, the Adolamite, to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of the place, Where is the cult prostitute, the holy woman, who was at Enim at the roadside?

And they said, No cult prostitute has been here. So he returned to Judah and said, I've not found her. Also the men of the place said, No cult prostitute has been here. Then Judah replied, Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at.

You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her. About three months later, Judah was told, Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has been immoral.

[4 : 39] Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality. And Judah said, Bring her out and let her be burned. 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, More literally, She is righteous, not I, since I did not give her to my son, Sheila.

And he did not know her again. 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 it and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, This one came out first.

Is this ringing bells? 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. Now afterwards, his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

[6 : 06] Amen. May God bless to us. This is his word. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to this chapter that we read together in Genesis chapter 38.

Perhaps the first thing to notice about a passage like this is that it's here in the Bible at all.

Just this week, we've seen, haven't we, Channel 4 pulling a documentary about Islam from its schedule because of violent threats from those who will not hear even the slightest questioning as to the morals of some of that religion's heroes.

We've seen the murder of the U.S. ambassador in Libya and others by people likewise enraged about the slurs on their religious figures.

But how shockingly different are these Christian scriptures which don't airbrush out even the worst sins of the great ones of the Bible story but rather, in fact, laid out in shocking detail warts and all to make us blush with embarrassment as we read these things on a Sunday morning in church.

[7 : 41] We might rather wish we didn't have to face up to such things in church but if Christ's apostle tells us and he does that all scripture is God-breathed and is useful both to show us the way of salvation and to prepare us for works of service then, well, who are we to say otherwise even about a chapter like this?

But one thing surely we can see is that here is a book that we can trust. It tells the truth, the whole truth and indeed nothing but the truth unlike, alas, it seems even the hierarchy of South Yorkshire police.

There's no cover-up here in this chapter, is there? It's all right out in the open and the history of God's people is like that and let me just say if you are investigating the Christian faith then that fact alone I think is something that ought to make you want to take the Bible quite seriously.

It is honest, it's absolutely real and realistic. It's not trying to seduce the gullible and it's quite prepared on occasion to shock the genteel with the truth about the human heart, a truth that the secular intelligentsia of our day-to-day so often actually want to hide from.

So this story is here but why is it here? It may seem that it interrupts the story of Joseph that began last week and which continues in chapter 39 but if you were here last week we saw it, didn't we, that chapter 37 to 50 the end of Genesis is the account of Jacob not the account of Joseph chapter 37 verse 2 this is the generations these are the generations of Jacob in other words it's the story of the whole family of Israel of God's chosen people the people of destiny through whom he'll bless the world but what a mess this family is in talk about dysfunction and that very much whether even the Jeremy Kyle show has ever had a family quite like this murdering marauding brothers massacring a whole town do you remember back in 34 merciless fratricide last week in chapter 37 selling their own brother for 20 pieces of silver into slavery and almost certain death and now here in this chapter there are all kinds of sexual depravity and incest and dishonor and dirt they really are a rotten and undesirable bunch this family of Israel who on earth we might ask is going to save them and salvage them for any possible place that they can have in the plan and purposes of God well the answer that we get in these later chapters of Genesis is two men will save them yes Joseph of course but also Judah

[10 : 45] Judah also who in some ways will become an even greater savior than Joseph and in this chapter Judah is actually marked out as the leader of this family for the future a truth that's underlined later on when we come to chapter 48 when he's blessed by Jacob before his death as the one from whom the rulers of Israel will certainly come so despite what we might think we really ought to rename these last chapters of Genesis not the story of Joseph but the story of Joseph and Judah in fact you'll see if you read the whole story carefully that they are bracketed towards the beginning and the end by a focus on Joseph and Judah together and right in the very middle chapter 34 and 45 again the whole turning point of this story centers on these two men Judah who offers himself as a substitute in the place of Benjamin and Joseph who then mercifully forgives his brothers for their sin against them so this whole story centers upon these two brothers above all else and upon their stories during the 22 years or so that unfolds in these chapters if this was a play it would be on two stages happening at the same time simultaneously if it was a film we would be constantly flipping back between the two scenes the two stories that are going on simultaneously because chapter 38 here plays out at exactly the same time as chapters 39 to 41 it covers the same 20 odd years

Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery chapter 41 we're told he was 30 when he entered Pharaoh's service and then there were those seven years of plenty and two years after the beginning of that famine then afterwards the brothers came to Egypt so while Joseph is in Egypt and he grows up and he marries and he has sons by the way naming his sons himself after the name of the Lord his God well while that happens back in Canaan Judah also marries and has sons and sees them grow up and marries off his eldest son the parallel stories but are very different in character as we'll see and yet God is preparing each of these brothers for their own very special place in his unfolding plan of salvation each has a crucial role to play as a deliverer of God's people

God uses Joseph who was upright and godly from the start of his life but he also uses Judah who most certainly was not and this chapter before us today is crucial in explaining just how the Lord works out his purpose to bring deliverance to his people through Judah's own seed and also to bring deliverance first to Judah's own soul it's a wonderful example of what the apostle Paul in 1st Timothy chapter 1 calls the perfect patience of God's mercy that can take the chief of sinners a blasphemer a persecutor an insolent opponent of the purposes of God as Paul was and yet appoint him into his service to bring about the salvation of many need of all whom God has appointed to eternal life so let's look at the text in the light of that and see this light shining even in the darkness that seems so pervasive throughout everything that we've read and it is dark isn't it look at verses 1 to 10 they tell a story of departure and defiance a sad departure that leads to selfish defiance of God's promise it happened at that time says verse 1 in other words the Judah who was just so callously sold his brother Joseph into slavery for 20 pieces of silver this Judah departs altogether from his brothers from the covenant community he went down we're told and he turned aside that is he allied himself with the

Canaanites and with their way of life and with their culture there are ominous echoes here aren't there of what's gone before the story of Lot for example who likewise left Abraham and went down to live among the cities of the plain and that's what these verses are telling us very clearly verses 1 to 5 tell of a sad departure from the covenant family they tell of a breaking away of this man from the church of God altogether his closest friend and influence is Hira a pagan a Canaanite and he sees and marries we're told a Canaanite woman and begets children with her the whole thing breathes the air of ominous darkness look at verses 2 and 3 he saw he took her he went into her that has overtones again of illicit taking doesn't it remember Eve in the garden of Eden she saw and she took remember Shechem in chapter 34 he saw and he took Dinah a marriage to a

Canaanite that was anathema to Abraham and to Isaac it would have been a deep grief to Jacob Judah's father we're not even told her name do you see that you got you got the distinct impression don't you that Judah was a thoroughly unreconstructed man women were just for sex and for childbearing and nothing more indeed perhaps he wasn't even much involved or interested in his children at all notice it's his mother it's the mother who gives them their names not Judah a stark contrast to Joseph's sons who were named by Joseph after his God and indeed it's hardly a picture is it of a happy home and of healthy family life certainly when these sons grow up what we see in verses 6 to 10 is a picture of selfish defiance er is so evil the Lord has to put him to death verse 7 we've never come across that before in the story of Genesis there's been plenty of evil ones it's interesting that in the

[17:18] Hebrew text his name er is just the word evil spelled backwards er was ra a pun on his name and then there's more of the same verse 10 with his brother Onan pretty grim stuff isn't it we're not told anything about er but we are told about Onan's crime what was it that deserved such severe punishment from God well verses 8 to 9 tell us in fairly earthy and explicit terms but we need to understand what the issue here really is the sin is not simply that Onan wasted his seed upon the ground as verse 9 relates the sin is that he did this we're told in order not to give offspring to his brother which verse 8 tells us you see was his duty as a brother-in-law to Tamar his brother's widow and that phrase perform the duty of a brother-in-law in verse 8 it's just a single word in the

Hebrew and rather suggests it's a technical term for what was a time-honored custom and so it was in those ancient Israelite cultures and indeed it was also honored in God's law if you read later on in Deuteronomy chapter 25 it lays it all out it's called the law of levirate marriage after the word levir the Latin word meaning brother-in-law and the purpose of it was to honor the family name of the dead man and to ensure that his name would live on in legal offspring he also honored the widow to ensure that she wasn't left childless and without an inheritance without a family to care for her without which in those days she'd be in a very difficult position although it was a custom Moses actually insisted upon it in the law later on why would he have to insist because it could be a costly thing for the living brother to do it would mean for example that he would not get his extra share of his father's inheritance which would otherwise have come to him because of his brother's death no it would go instead to his sister-in-law and to the offspring that she bore and that is what explains

Onan's action here in verse 9 he knew the son wouldn't be his and therefore this son would inherit what would otherwise belong to him and so he didn't want there to be a son he was purely being greedy there's no way he was going to give up his loot it's ironic isn't it Judah he's just a chip off the old block Judah sold his living brother for silver and now Onan that's just so true to life isn't it family disputes over inheritance of property and wills and things you see that Dallas is back on the TV again it's extraordinary isn't it 30 years after we all asked who shot JR and people of my generation were glued to the TV on a Tuesday night as we watched JR and Bobby fighting it out over what over who was going to inherit South Fort Ranch what do you know in the next generation it's the same old story all over again so verse 9 you see tells us that

Onan was quite happy to use and abuse poor Tamar for sex oh yes but denied her any possibility of offspring it was utter selfishness not to mention callous cruelty but of course there's more to it even than that isn't there because this family is not an ordinary family in this family offspring seed offspring are part of a sacred trust way beyond just the natural order God's promise to this family is all about offspring the seed of the promise and in actually opposing and frustrating the continuance of the rightful line of Judah's seed Onan Onan is deliberately defying the covenant God he's not just selfishly abusing his dead brother for his own greed and shockingly so he's shaking his fist at God himself despising his covenant and his promise and God will not be so mocked so says verse 10 the

Lord put him to death also you may find by the way all this judgment very harsh you may even find it unacceptable to you certainly as Ralph Davis comments it is very much a sin against the spirit of our age but just in case you're tempted to say look all this Old Testament God stuff is terrible give us the God of the New Testament aren't you Christians let me just suggest perhaps that this afternoon you go home and you read Acts chapter 5 or 1 Corinthians chapter 11 just as two examples to see how the New Testament God deals in very similar way to a Christian couple who just told a fib about their giving or to some other Christians whose crime was that they misbehaved at the communion table or perhaps you want to read the words of gentle Jesus meek and mild who speaks far far more terrifying words about judgment than any

[22 : 53] Old Testament prophet ever did it's the New Testament actually that teaches us that the real God at least the God Jesus spoke of that the real God will give people what they want what they ask for and if what they want is to defy God's gracious covenant to scorn him to say to God get away from me then he will withdraw himself in the end just as Jesus did from the people who scorned him and rejected him but he is life and therefore his presence is our life and therefore his withdrawal is death and his permanent withdrawal is the withdrawal of life permanently and eternally well that was

Onan the life of God withdrawn from him and poor Tamar twice bereaved although well maybe she felt some relief at the death of these men who would blame her but poor Tamar now she is abused all over again and this time by her father-in-law by Judah because verses 11 to 26 tell a story of dishonor and deception a shameful dishonor that leads to a shaming deception of God's patriarch Judah was a man of dignity and of substance in the community and he should have cared for Tamar in his home she had been a wife to two of his sons but he too is utterly selfish he dishonors Tamar sends her back to her father's house although he retains control of her by betrothing her to his youngest son oh wait till he grows up she says but of course we're told that

Judah has no intention whatsoever of ever honoring that pledge because verse 11 he feared that Shelah also would die in other words he blamed Tamar for the death he thought she was the jinx he didn't want his third son to go the same way he is totally blind he is spiritually anesthetized isn't he can't see that this is God at work can't see it at all and again that is so typical isn't it of human beings we'll blame anyone won't we for our mistakes except our own sin often accept the sin of our children often people are even more blind aren't they to the sin of their children so poor Tamar is the scapegoat here time passes verse 12 and it becomes clear as verse 14 says that Judah had reneged on his pledge Shelah was not given to Tamar as a husband and she's left as a widow although trapped by this betrothal she can't marry another she's got no husband no children and no future and legal redress is impossible for somebody in her situation so what can she do well verse 12 tells us what she does do this shamefully dishonored woman engages in a deception that will shame

Judah publicly and will expose the truth to all about who really is the problem in this tragic family what was what was Tamar's motive was it revenge of a woman scorned I don't think so certainly what the text focuses on is not that rather what we're confronted with is a huge contrast between this ignorant pagan girl with so little by way of any spiritual privilege in her background and Judah the son of Jacob and his sons of the covenant with all their privileged spiritual heritage they despise and dishonor the holy and precious covenant purposes of God but Tamar the pagan Canaanite she's full of concern not only for the natural

God-given desire for family and for children but for more than that for the specific desire to play her rightful role as the matriarch of Judah's eldest line in propagating the seed of Abraham she's shown to us as one of the many foreigners in the story of God's people who we see has understood that the living God is among this people regardless of their faults and is determined to push her way into this covenant of grace determined to play her part in the story of God's salvation hers is the spirit of a Rahab or a Ruth and she's not going to be denied her place in God's story now it's true her strategy might rather make us blush and the text doesn't comment on the morality of her actions to condone them we might think that the contrast with sexual chastity in chapter 39 makes it pretty clear what is a better way of truly trusting faith but nevertheless there is no doubt that

[28 : 32] Tamar is the hero in this story her desire is in the right place and she took a huge risk doing what she did she knew that she risked death death by burning as chapter verse 24 makes very clear but she is determined to win her place in Israel's family however flawed that family might be and however flawed her own methods might be her endeavor is an act of daring faith I find myself thinking about that woman in Mark chapter 5 the woman with the issue of blood do you remember she's so confused and superstitious she thinks if only she can get near and touch Jesus robe she'll be healed as though it was some sort of magic at work and yet for all her fault and confusion she knew the place of God's blessing and where it was to be found and she grabbed it and that's Tamar that's what's going on here verse 12 tells us

Judah had been bereaved again this time of his nameless wife seems to have been precious little mourning for her no mention of grief for his sons either by the way a very stark contrast isn't it to Jacob's grief over Joseph and quite soon we're told he's off to the sheep shearing with Hira his pagan chum now you need to understand that the sheep shearing was festival time it was party time it was marked mainly by a very great deal of drink and by a lot of promiscuous sex if you read first Samuel 25 that story of Nabal and Abigail you'll find that it was all to do with the sheep shearing festival and that's why Nabal was plastered out of his mind and got in such trouble and Canaanite religion was totally at one with all this kind of revelry the more you had sex with all sorts of women the more the fertility effect would sort of rub off on the crops and the fertility would spread to the fields and you'd be prosperous so you mixed religion and sex for the common good of society terrific sexual freedom and swinging and sharing and redefining pornography as art redefining promiscuity as good and healthy and then having it blessed by the church as something wholesome and spiritual and to be celebrated absolutely marvelous no wonder that kind of religion was very popular yet it rather sounds familiar doesn't it it ironic isn't it that today today people call that sort of way of living progressive in fact it's regressive it's regressive to the ways of primitive

Canaanite paganism belongs with the kind of behavior of people who bow down to worship sticks and who sacrifice their babies in the fire to bring them good luck and to ward off evil but Judah the son of Israel whose God was the living God of goodness and of purity and of truth and of beauty Judah was by now totally immersed in this Canaanite way and so he was off to worship the gods of wine and women with all his might and Tamar and Tamar and Tamar and Tamar knew that Tamar knew that Tamar knew that Tamar and Tamar knew that and that was what you can pretend away by the language that you use you have sex with a holy woman and it becomes a holy act but that doesn't fool God and he calls a spade a spade in verse 15 here it's just the plain and nasty word prostitute there was nothing holy in

Judah's mind absolutely not and by the way nor should we think that we can turn something that is ugly and perverse into something holy either just by changing its name something like marriage for example applying that name to something that is the very opposite of marriage does not make it holy and right well Judah needs no encouragement verse 16 it's pretty crass come on let's do it effectively is what he says what's my pay she says a goat but understandably enough she wants a credit note your signet and your core that is your personal seal and your staff with your name on it or in our language I suppose I want your credit card and I want your business card with your name and contact details okay says Judah okay come on let's get into bed hard to believe isn't it how how a man with power and with public position can be so reckless and put himself in a position like that it's astonishing isn't it but

I suppose ask Dominique Strauss can about that many many others who have similarly come a cropper just the same way due to their galloping gonads well at the first hint of trouble is there in verse 20 the woman isn't there and Judah sends his friend off with the payment maybe he's rather sobered up and feeling a bit sheepish that's why he doesn't go himself he sends somebody else it's funny isn't it how he's very willing to honor this pledge of the pledge made to his own daughter in law and broke it extraordinary isn't it but again men do that sort of thing don't they utterly warped thinking fall over themselves constantly for a lover whilst at the same time shamefully neglecting and abusing a wife and their own family but Judah's worried verse 23 that he's going to be a laughing stock so he says let's just leave it little did he know just what a laughing stock he was going to be so verse 24 three months pass no doubt it's all forgotten for

[34 : 46] Judah but of course the inevitable happens Tamar is exposed as pregnant and Judah it seems with no investigation just demands that she's punished by death almost as though he's rather thrilled and pleased isn't it to have this opportunity to get rid of this festering problem in his family life it's just stinking hypocrisy isn't it the double standard the sanctimony but it is isn't it so often sinners who are hard on other sinners William still comments very perceptively it's those who know themselves purified only by grace who are loath to condemn their own sins in others but there's none of that in Judah just sanctimonious hypocrisy and then Tamar plays her trump card just like

Nathan coming to David Judah is confronted you are the man you ever had that sensation that thud cramping nausea in your stomach when in an instant you've been exposed you've been humiliated you've been shamed well that was Judah wasn't it in verse 26 and he's floored and his words sum up the absolute truth both about Tamar and about himself literally she is righteous not I her desire and her determination has been noble and good and faithful despite the deception but his has been utterly selfish and shameful and unfaithful she is righteous not I but those words it seems did mark a turning point in

Judah's life God's grace through that humiliation and that shame it touched him and it changed him there's a first mark of that I think in the very next line he did not know her again applies I think a changing of his ways and of course it is a very very different Judah that we meet when we come to chapter 43 and 44 when I read this I can't help thinking of men like Jonathan Aitken the former cabinet minister or Chuck Colson who died recently Richard Nixon's former hatchet man it was through just such public disgrace and humiliation that these powerful men came to experience God's amazing grace wasn't it and so often it is for men of power and influence and of stature perhaps there's no other way for men like that to be humbled and that was certainly the story here

God's grace was in Judah's disgrace as a means of the deliverance of his soul and as a means of a far far greater deliverance also that's the significance of these last few verses verses 27 to 30 they're all about delivery and deliverance a surprising delivery that reminds us of the sovereign deliverance of God's plan the twins verse 27 are surely a gift of God's kindness and mercy to poor Tamar so abused in life and yet so desiring above all to bear the rightful heir of the line of Judah she has two sons despite losing two husbands and also I think it was a mark of God's kindness and grace to Judah that God had not abandoned him and indeed that in his rich and wonderful mercy God would make the blessing of Abraham flow through his own family line his sons that's certainly the significance of the attention that's drawn to this surprising delivery it's so clearly isn't it history repeating itself remember the twins

Esau and Jacob and the struggle in the womb that took place there in their birth in chapter 25 well here it is again Zerah we're told is technically the firstborn his hand comes out he gets a red cord put around it interesting too isn't it that it's a red cord just like Esau who was known by his redness but just like Esau he is also overtaken by the younger one by Perez and that is a clear sign of God's familiar pattern of electing grace here in Genesis which overturns the natural order of man it's Abel not Cain it's Isaac not Ishmael it's Jacob not Esau and here it's Perez not Zerah it's underlined in his name also Perez the footnote tells us it means breach and indeed it can but it's the very word that God used to Jacob back in chapter 28 verse 14 when God made his great promise to Jacob your offspring will be like the dust of the earth he says and you shall

[40 : 20] Perez you shall spread abroad you shall increase abundantly to east and west and north and south and in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed Moses hearers would never miss the significance the resonance of that name Perez and what it signified and they also know that Jacob in his old age blessed Judah's descendants as the royal line will come to that in chapter 48 the scepter will not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs so they would understand you see that what God is saying here in these verses in an astonishing way at the end of this dreadful chapter that what God is saying is out of this sordid mess my covenant purposes are not being hindered but they're being fulfilled God's sovereign purpose will never be stopped and of course later his rights knew also didn't they when they read the book of Ruth and the book of

Kings and Chronicles that ten generations later from this child Perez his line came none other than David the anointed ruler of God's people and of course we know that all those years later from his seed came at last the anointed one the Lord Jesus Christ the great deliverer the great rescuer not only of this family from all its sin and shame but from those of every family on the earth who trust him for salvation in other words what Moses is teaching his people here and teaching us by telling a story that's so grim and as grimy as this what he's telling us is that despite all the evil and the mess and the sordidness and the shamefulness of this story and despite all the wickedness of wicked men and weak men and what they meant for evil God meant it for good for the deliverance of many many sinful people from the mess and the shame and the sorrow of their lives lived formerly in defiance of his grace and his mercy and friends if God can work into his wonderful story of grace and mercy and of saving glory if God can work into that story even the story of these people in this dark chapter then surely there can be no darkness too dark for his grace to transform let me just end with three things that I want to say by way of conclusion first we don't say of course that because of a chapter like this we don't say human sin doesn't matter among those who claim the name of God's covenant people we don't say oh shall we continue in sin that grace may abound to use

Paul's words we don't say as Ralph Davis puts it let us fornicate so that God can save the world of course not well that does seem to be the attitude of some in the professing church today but surely the severity of God's judgment in verses 1 to 10 alone ought to be enough to tell us that sin is always wrong let alone the warning of Judah's great humiliation be sure your sin will find you out is what Moses taught his people and we'd do well wouldn't we as Christian people to listen to Christ's apostles in Hebrews when he tells us no creature is hidden from God's sight but all lie naked and exposed that's the truth the Lord sees and he knows our private thoughts and our private acts that's why the apostle says let us worship God with reverence at all for our God our God is a consuming fire now we don't say human sin doesn't matter but what we can say surely is that no human sin or opposition can ever derail

God's amazing grace God is not dependent on and God is not at the mercy of his people and what a comfort that ought to be to us second this story also surely tells us that no human sinners are beyond God's grace if they will be humbled and turn again to him for mercy nor are any sinners beyond faithful service in Christ's kingdom God gets his servants in very different ways doesn't he Joseph as we said was upright from the start Joseph learned the cost of obedience through 20 years in Egypt trained by grace to harden him for service in God's plan but Judah by contrast was a rebel and he learned the cost of disobedience over those 20 years and was transformed by grace as God humbled him to serve his role in his kingdom and what a change there was wrought in him to become the man that we'll see in chapter 44

Martin Luther comments that God permitted this shameful story to be written for us that no one should be proud of their own righteousness and wisdom and again that no one should despair on the account of his sins Luther also said once in another place that God made the world out of nothing and that often he must bring us to nothing before he can begin to make something out of us for him that was Judah here wasn't it just as it was the apostle Paul I was a blasphemer a persecutor an insolent opponent I was the chief of sinners but I receive mercy that in me Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe on him for eternal life that was

[47 : 00] Judah that was Paul maybe that's you certainly been many many many people just like Judah and like Paul for decades of their lives and often it does take a humiliating shock to bring someone to themselves in humility before God well if that's you friend then this chapter tells you it's not too late it's not too late it's not too late to be saved by the grace of God and it's not too late either to find service in the kingdom of Christ marvelous service to bring glory to Jesus if you also like Judah will be humbled in order that the Lord can lift you up and put your life together again and he can do that but third and last this story surely also reminds us that

God's grace and mercy truly is extended to every family of the earth God's promise is not just for those of every national family and tribe and nation but also it's for those of every kind of family on the earth even disaster families like this the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ the lion of the tribe of Judah is that there is forgiveness and belonging and meaning and purpose and glory even for the discarded outsider even for the abused and the misused for the downtrodden for the messed up for the ignorant those who are ignorant and in the dark as Tamar certainly was and yet who as best they can are desperately seeking the light of the promise of God among the people of God Tamar was a complete pagan she was from a spiritually barren background she had a terrible marriage to an evil man she then had an abusive semi marriage to another evil man she was used as a chattel her whole extended family was a disaster and she herself was hardly a model of morality and yet this woman was touched by the promise of

God's saving grace just like Rahab the prostitute was later on just as Ruth the pagan Moab was later on and she was taken up and became like them a carrier of the seed of salvation she played a unique role in bringing the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting through the seed of Judah through the Lord Jesus Christ himself and her name is recorded forever not only here but as you know in the opening words of Matthew's gospel as one of the four women who are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus you know what every one of those four women Rahab and Tamar and Ruth and Bathsheba everyone came from outside Israel they were foreigners and every one of them came from a highly suspect and scandalous relationship but God's grace can reach into every kind of relationship and every kind of family and every kind of human life to bring deliverance full and free and wonderful and liberating and what men and women once meant for evil he is able to turn on its head utterly and to bring lives of transformation and tremendous faithfulness and fruitfulness for his name's sake so let's praise him for the perfect patience of his wonderful mercy which is offered to all who will heed him through our

Lord Jesus Christ Amen