

“The Sinfulness of Sin”
Genesis 38:1-30
April 9th, 2017

President Calvin Coolidge returned home one Sunday afternoon from attending worship services. Mrs. Coolidge, who was unable to attend, asked him what the preacher’s sermon was about.

Coolidge replied: “Sin.” His wife then asked him to expand upon the sermon, and Coolidge said: “Well, I think he was against it.”

Most of us think that we're fairly good people. But it can be like a bunch of wart hogs standing around talking about who's the best looking. You'd say, "Hang on guys, it doesn't matter who you think is best looking. You're all ugly.”

It doesn't matter how good we think we are compared with someone else. In God's sight we're all sinners in need of God’s saving grace.

The last two Sundays, we’ve examined the 37th chapter of Genesis. We’ve learned that Jacob’s favored son, Joseph, was not liked by his brothers. When the opportunity presented itself, many miles away from their father, the brothers treated Joseph harshly – taking his colorful tunic that Jacob gave him, and then casting him into a pit without water. That chapter ends with Joseph being sold by his brothers into the hands of Midianites (pagans), and what looked like a lifetime of servitude.

The passage before us this morning zeroes in on one of Joseph’s brothers – Judah. It is helpful for us to remember that it serves to emphasize the steep moral decline in the chosen family.

Genesis 38:1-30:

It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name *was* Hirah. ² And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name *was* Shua, and he married her and went in to her. ³ So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. ⁴ She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. ⁵ And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him.”

⁶ Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name *was* Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. ⁸ And Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother.” ⁹ But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother’s wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. ¹⁰ And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also.

¹¹ Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, “Remain a widow in your father’s house till my son Shelah is grown.” For he said, “Lest he also die like his brothers.” And Tamar went and dwelt in her father’s house.

¹² Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah’s wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³ And it was told Tamar, saying, “Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.” ¹⁴ So she took off her widow’s garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself,

and sat in an open place which *was* on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife. ¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, because she had covered her face. ¹⁶ Then he turned to her by the way, and said, “Please let me come in to you”; for he did not know that she *was* his daughter-in-law.

So she said, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?”

¹⁷ And he said, “I will send a young goat from the flock.”

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

¹⁸ Then he said, “What pledge shall I give you?”

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

²⁰ And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman’s hand, but he did not find her. ²¹ Then he asked the men of that place, saying, “Where is the harlot who *was* openly by the roadside?”

And they said, “There was no harlot in this *place*.”

²² So he returned to Judah and said, “I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this *place*.”

²³ Then Judah said, “Let her take *them* for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her.”

²⁴ And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she *is* with child by harlotry.”

So Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned!”

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

²⁶ So Judah acknowledged *them* and said, “She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.” And he never knew her again.

²⁷ Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb. ²⁸ And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” ²⁹ Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, “How did you break through? *This breach be upon you!*” Therefore his name was called Perez. ³⁰ Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.”

For this disturbing text, I wish to share three point of application.

1 – There is Spiritual Danger when we drift from our Support Network.

Judah “departed from his brothers” (v. 1). That action played directly into Judah’s meeting a pagan woman and then marrying her. He likely followed his heart, and as such fell in love with a woman he had no business getting involved with because she was not among the people of God. In wandering away from his brothers, Judah had no counselors to rely upon except himself. As such, he serves as an illustration of **Proverbs 11:14**, which teaches us, “Where *there is* no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors *there is* safety.” Judah was in serious danger when he left his brothers

We saw this take place a few chapters back in Genesis, when Dinah “went out to see the daughters of the land.” (**Genesis 34:1**) Dinah was put in a vulnerable position (or she put herself in one), and sure enough, the pagan Shechem saw her, took her, and raped her.

Similarly, friends we are at great risk if we drift from our “brothers”, meaning we resist or depart from the protection and fellowship of the Church. When God saves people from their sins, He saves them to Himself and His people. There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian who steers clear of the fellowship of God’s people.

It is fitting, isn’t it, that we come to this text on a day when we receive Joe, Holly, Jase, and Hadley into our membership? On that yellow bulletin insert containing the declarations of church membership, some privileges of membership are also listed. Notice, among them, is “special oversight by the elders of the congregation.” God has created a structure for His Church, and He is wise and compassionate to give His people an umbrella under which to be against the storms of life in a fallen world.

How do you eat a banana? You first separate it from the rest of the bunch. And that’s how the devil destroys Christians too. To overcome our isolationist penchant, and our tendency to wander, God collects His people within the protection of His Church.

2 – Sin is No Respector of Persons; each of us is Sinful and under its Influence.

While away from his brothers, Judah falls in love with a Canaanite woman, marries her, and has a family with her. Before you think this is something wonderful, don’t forget what God’s Word has instructed us thus far about marriage!

* **Genesis 24:1-4** – “Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ² So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, “Please, put your hand under my thigh, ³ and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; ⁴ but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

* **Genesis 28:1-2** – “Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. ² Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.”

The Apostle Paul’s New Testament teaching on inter-marriage is in **2 Corinthians 6:14-16a** – “Don’t become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That’s not partnership; that’s war. Is light best friends with dark? Does Christ go strolling with the Devil? Do trust and mistrust hold hands? Who would think of setting up pagan idols in God’s holy Temple? (*The Message*)

Verse 3 in our text today reveals that the nameless Canaanite wife Judah marries gave birth to a son, Er. Verse 7 reveals Er was a wicked man (*perhaps due in large measure to his mother’s ungodly influence?*). She gives birth to a second son, Onan, who is a selfish man not willing to live up to God’s will. And we note finally, that Judah’s sin is more than his marrying a pagan wife; he commits incest with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, while she was disguised as a temple prostitute. (v. 18)

Two brief points – first, *do you find it troubling that God killed Er (v. 7) and Onan (v. 10)?* That may seem offensive, but I'd ask you to think back to what we learned earlier in our study of Genesis.

In **Genesis 6:5-7**, we learn that “the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth; He said He'd destroy humanity...from the face of the earth... because He was sorry that He made them.” The whole population of the world was corrupt and God destroyed them;

In **Genesis 19**, God destroyed the wicked people of Sodom. There are two other important Old Testament passages to this point.

* **I Samuel 2:6** – “The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up.”

* **Deuteronomy 32:39** – “Now see that I, *even I, am* He, and *there is* no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor *is there any* who can deliver from My hand.”

Since God is sovereign and He ordains everything that comes to pass, He is the one responsible for life and death of any creature He made. That means not only does God intend life to glorify Him, but He intends death to glorify Him as well. We must not somehow think that sin, suffering, and death are something outside of God's plan!

The other point is this – sin is progressive; it is like creeping Charlie in your yard; unchecked, it will take over your yard and kill off the good grass. The sinfulness of sin is that one sin inevitably leads to another. Ultimately most sins are found out. Sin has tentacles, and you will be entangled in them. If Judah sinned so easily in going to Tamar, then any of us can likewise sin, regardless of our background, privileges, or training. We must confess our sinful natures and stay close to God, from Whom alone the strength to resist temptation comes.

3 – Our Hope is in a Gracious God.

Despite all the sin present in this chapter, and the many threats to His promises, God worked in this situation for good. From the incestuous relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar came Perez. When we look to the genealogies of Jesus Christ (**Matthew 1:3** and **Luke 3:33**), we see Perez included in Jesus' family tree!

A husband and wife didn't really love each other. The man was very demanding, so much so that he prepared a list of rules and regulations for his wife to follow. He insisted that she read them over every day and obey them to the letter. Among other things, his "do's and don'ts" indicated such details as what time she had to get up in the morning, when his breakfast should be served, and how the housework should be done.

After several long years, the husband died. As time passed, the woman fell in love with another man, one who dearly loved her. Soon they were married. This husband did everything he could to make his new wife happy, continually showering her with tokens of his appreciation.

One day as he was cleaning house, she found tucked away in a drawer the list of commands her first husband had drawn up for her. As she looked it over, it dawned on her that even though her present husband hadn't given her any kind of list, she was doing everything her first husband's list required anyway. She realized she was so devoted to this man that her deepest desire was to please him out of love, not obligation.

Romans 5:20b-21 – “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

So it is with our relationship to God in Christ. If we only strive to gain favor through obedience, we'll always fall short because life is hard. When we delight in God, He gives us the wherewithal to live in grace, and it isn't hard.