

## **How God Straightens Out a Crooked Life Genesis 38**

I wonder how many of you would say about yourself or your family, “Boy, if people really knew how I was or how our family related to one another behind closed doors, they would have a different impression of me or us.” I wonder how many of us would say that. Probably most of us.

At times you might think that your life or the events in your family could be featured on the cover of some tabloid you would pick up at the checkout line of the grocery store.

[Have you ever noticed that no one ever claims to read those tabloids. But, truth be known, chances are most of us try to at least sneak-a-peek at some of those covers? I mean, you have to admit, some of the pictures and the titles can be a little intriguing. I mean, look at some of these: Read headlines on screen]

Well if the National Enquirer or Star or the National Examiner existed in ancient biblical times, you’d probably see the story we’re going to be looking at today exposed on the front cover.

- Heir to Promised Land Guilty of Incest
- Sordid Seduction Humiliates Hebrew Son
- Harlot Escapes Public Execution: Inside: Her Clever Plan

If you were to give modern day names to the people involved in this story, it would be the kind of tabloid morsel that would be featured on Oprah or the Jerry Springer show. In some ways, it’s kind of hard to believe it’s in the Bible, actually. But it is. And from this story, we’re going to discover how God straightens out a crooked life.

Today we’re beginning a new series of messages called “A View from Above.” It’s series that looks at the lives of three women in the Bible, and how God accomplishes His ultimate purpose through their lives.

In a moment, I want you to hear the story. But first you need a little background. In this story, you’ll be introduced to a man named, Judah.

Judah is the great grandson of a man named Abraham. All Jews trace their lineage back to Abraham. And it was with Abraham that God made a promise. He promised that through him and his family line, that God would raise up a deliverer. We know him as Jesus.

Well, it turns out that Judah is in the line of the big three Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Jacob had 12 sons, from whom came the 12 tribes of Israel, with Judah being the ancestral source of the tribe of Judah.

Well Judah had 3 sons, Er, Onan and Shelah.

Er marries Tamar. And that’s where the story begins.

So sit back and relax and listen to the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar.

[READ STORY]

Isn't that unbelievable. But it's true. After hearing that story, you're probably nudging your husband or wife and saying, "Hey hon', we're not doing too bad!"

But the fact is, each of us has skeletons in our closet. And today, we're going to learn from this story how God straightens out my crooked life. First, we learn that he does so by helping me...

### **Break out of my selfishness**

We see this over and over in the story. Each of the principle individuals in this story is guilty of selfishness. And it's their selfishness that leads to the severely dysfunctional behavior of this family. For example, let's start with the patriarch of the family, Judah. Early in the chapter it tells us that...

*"There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and lay with her." (v. 2)*

Why is this significant? Remember, the Messiah, the one we know as Jesus Christ was promised to come from Abraham and his descendents – Hebrew descendents! Abraham was Judah's great-grandfather. He would probably be "rolling over in his grave" if he

knew that Judah was getting a wife from a godless nation of people known as the Canaanites to perpetuate the Messianic line.

But in his selfishness Judah decided he was going to do what he wanted to do. He wasn't thinking about others or family. He was only thinking of himself.

Then there's Onan. This is the delicate part of the story. After Er's death, Tamar's best hope for security was a Jewish law, which obligated Er's brother, Onan, to father children with her. Technically, Onan had no choice in the matter, and neither did Tamar. Out of loyalty to her dead husband and his family line, Tamar must have children with another son in the family if at all possible.

But this is where the plot begins to thicken. Onan knows good and well that if he fathers a son with Tamar, then he, that is Onan, would have to share the inheritance with Tamar's son. How do we know this? Because the story tells us that...

*"But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so [he purposefully did not fulfill his responsibility to produce] offspring for his brother." (v. 9)*

Onan wasn't into sharing. He was into himself. He was selfish. So he found a way to make sure he wouldn't fulfill his husbandly responsibilities.

Then there's Judah, again. This exchange between him and Tamar further reveals his selfish motives.

*Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." (v. 11)*

In other words, by now Judah was spooked. He had lost not one but two of his sons to death when they were with Tamar. He wasn't about to lose his last remaining son to this woman who seemed cursed. Of course, it didn't seem to even occur to him that they did evil in the eyes of God.

So, Judah feels justified to abdicate his responsibility to care for her as a widow. So he send her off, back to her father.

The Bible is clear. Not caring for widows is unjust. Tamar did not live in a free market society. Even an able bodied young woman couldn't just go out and get a job. Widows were socially and economically vulnerable.

Tamar was Judah's responsibility. In his selfishness, for his own convenience, he turned her away.

And then there's Tamar. What did she do? Well, obviously she feels unwanted. She's hurt. She's vulnerable. And she blames Judah for how awful her life has turned out. So she decides to take matters into her own hands. She decides meet out justice on her own. The story tells us that...

*"... she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to*

*Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife." (v. 14)*

For years, Tamar has been wearing widows clothes. Now she removes those drab clothes, and replaces them with a sleek veil that conceals her identity. Then she stations herself along the road that Judah will travel to get to his destination. We have no idea how long Tamar sat by the side of the road. We don't know if any other men propositioned her. We don't know if she actively seduced Judah. We just know she got even. And she did it her way.

Is that crazy and twisted and sordid, or what? Now, folks, that's dysfunction. What a mess! It's not wonder the Bible tells us...

*"For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice." (James 3:16)*

If God's going to straighten out my life, I must ask Him and take the initiative to break out of my selfishness. We can't believe everything the culture is telling us that it's all about us.

Ex. I mean, we live in a culture, where on Black Friday, which is supposed to be the biggest shopping day of the year for Christmas. In a season known for its generosity, people buy gifts for themselves, not others.

In spite of all the iPods and the iPads and the iPhones and the “have it your way” messages we receive everyday, selfish living creates disorder. Do you need more proof than this story?

What might selfishness look like in our lives? How about it’s impact on how we handle our money? Selfishness causes us to be stingy. It causes us to keep for ourselves and not give to others. So we fail to meet the genuine needs of others, even when God has blessed us with the means to do so.

It shows up in our relationships. When our focus is on ourselves, it doesn’t even occur to us to encourage someone else, to be understanding, to be compassionate, to show mercy. When we focus on ourselves, we become impatient with others and our circumstances, because we want others to do what we want them to do and circumstance to cater to our particular wants.

It shows up in addictions. I’ve talked to more than one family member who has shared the pain and destruction caused by an addiction – drugs, alcohol, pornography, whatever – that started with the self-gratification of one selfish individual

And I’ve talked to more than one member of a broken family, in which selfishness created an irreparable fissure in relationships, changing the whole course of life for the spouses and children.

Unfortunately, many of us are living under the consequences of selfish living. I wonder what you’d write into the next blank.

I’m guilty of selfishness in this area: \_\_\_\_\_

If we want God to straighten out our lives, we have to face our own selfishness and ask him to break us out of it. God also helps me...

### **Break out with repentance**

Gratefully, that’s what happened in Judah’s life. Before Judah unwittingly slept with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, and got her pregnant, she asked for some collateral – the modern day equivalent of his wallet and ID – to ensure that she’d get paid for her services.

After Judah gets word that Tamar has become pregnant while “carousing with other men,” he immediately demands that Tamar be burned to death. It was an unusually severe punishment even for that day.

Now, the dramatic scene. As Tamar, literally, is being dragged into the street to be killed, she pulls an unexpected ace from her sleeve. She presents Judah’s seal and other valuables as proof that he is the father of the child. And in a stunning change of events, the Bible tells us that...

*“Judah recognized them and said, ‘She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.’ And he did not sleep with her again.” (v. 26)*

Judah finally takes responsibility for his actions. He freely admits, publicly, that he had shirked his responsibility to his family and most of all to Tamar.

But not only did he confess, he repented. He not only admitted to his wrong, but “he did not sleep with her again.” He had a change of heart.

**Confession** is admitting that I was wrong.

**Repentance** is turning away from what it wrong.

And that’s what repentance is. It’s a change from my way to God’s way. It’s saying, “God I’m done with doing it my own selfish way, I embrace your way. I turn my back on my way, and turn to you.”

Elsewhere, the Bible says,

*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”*  
(Acts 3:19)

There is spiritual refreshment on the other side of repentance.

Ex. Ed Hochuli has always scored among the top of all NFL officials. He is generally accepted as one of the best officials in the NFL.

In September of 2008, in the final minutes of a game between the Denver Broncos and the San Diego Chargers, Hochuli made one of the worst calls of his career. When Denver quarterback Jay Cutler

fumbled the ball, Hochuli blew the whistle and called it an incomplete pass. He knew it was a mistake the minute he made it, but there was nothing he could do; an inadvertent whistle is a non-reviewable, non-reversible call. Instead of San Diego getting the ball, Denver was allowed to keep it. They scored a couple of plays later and won the game.

Needless to say, the San Diego fans were furious. They all but called for Ed Hochuli's head on a platter. Many wanted him fired and banned forever from the NFL. His office in Phoenix was flooded with angry calls. His Blackberry was jammed with angry emails.

Ed's response to the mistake, first of all, was to admit it immediately to San Diego coach Norv Turner. He walked to the Charger sideline, told Turner that he had made a bad call, he apologized, and explained that there was nothing he could do about it.

Ed also told the San Diego Union-Tribune that week, "Affecting the outcome of a game is a devastating feeling. Officials strive for perfection -- I failed miserably."

And then, Ed began responding to those angry emails, one by one. His response amazed people, resulting in even more emails -- upwards of 20,000 -- many from fans thanking him for owning up to his mistake.

Those are the actions of a repentant heart. What do you want to repent of. Fill in the blank, and ask God to forgive you and to redirect your life.

Maybe it's a selfish attitude you've kept in your heart. It's time to say, "I'm washing my hands of it. God, I'm embracing a new way of thinking. Turn my focus toward you and others."

Maybe it's the way you've been investing your time. It's time to say, "I'm not going to waste any more of my time doing that. God I want to use my time productively, purposefully, and profitably."

Maybe it's a sin you've allowed yourself to indulge in. It's time to say, "I'm putting a stop to this and I'm getting it out of my life. God, enable me to pursue your way."

Each one of us needs to admit that the problem is with us. We are to blame for our sin and our selfishness. And we need to break out of our crooked lives through the power of repentance.

But there's something else I must receive from God he's going to straighten out my crooked life. **He must break me out with His grace.**

### **Break Out with God's grace**

Look at **these amazing closing words to the story:**

*"When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, 'This one came out first.' But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, 'So*

*this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez. Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out and he was given the name Zerah.'" (vv. 27-30)*

And you're probably saying, "Dave, I thought you said this was an amazing end to the story. That's not very amazing." But it is amazing when you see the next verses on your outline. Look at them with me.

*"A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar." (Matthew 1:1-3)*

Wow! Did you see it. Circle it. There are those names again: Judah, Perez and Tamar. Do you see where they are? They are in the family tree of Jesus Himself! Can you believe that?

Can you believe, that God was able to take that totally dysfunctional series of events and the dysfunctional lives of Judah and Tamar, and redeem it for his purposes? For they themselves and their son to be in the family line Jesus Christ, who would rescue the world from their sin. That's incredible!

But it's just like God. He's a master at snatching victory out of the jaws of defeat. And here's the clincher: If he did it for Judah and Tamar, He can do it for you.

Do you know what the name, Perez, means? It means “break out.” God’s grace broke through regardless of the mess people had made of their lives. All the people in this story suffered greatly.

- Judah lost 2 sons. He was publicly humiliated. He was involved in an incestuous relationship.
- Tamar was forgotten, destitute. She sacrificed her dignity to meet out personal justice.

But then God showed up. God broke through and he provided hope through a little boy named Perez.

You may be here and feel like you’re without hope. You might not feel there is any hope for your family. Well you’re wrong. Because the Scriptures say:

*“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)*

God can straighten out our lives. Ask him for the power to break out of your own selfishness. Face it straight up. Meet it head on. Entrust yourself to God. Turn away (repent) of your selfish ways and embrace the ways of God.

There is hope. No matter how late in the game you think it is. No matter what wrong you’ve done. God provides hope through the forgiveness and leadership he offers through Jesus Christ.

One of my most favorite verses in the Bible says:

*“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”  
(Romans 5:20b)*

Listen to this story from someone in our church:

*“Over the last 5-6 years, I have been coming to Grace Brethren Church often – but more off than on, never realizing the role that I was to fulfill in my life. I would get here at 11:10 and leave right after the service never talking to many people. Just putting in my time and too proud to admit I needed anyone’s help. Over the last year I lost my job and then my marriage six months later. After that I did not turn from God, I ran towards Him.*

*“I reaffirmed my faith in November 2009. Since that time, my life has turned around and the restlessness is gone. I’m not running anymore. I feel a love and peace from God that I never had before.”* There’s always time for a fresh start. There’s always hope. And his name is Jesus Christ.

Maybe today is the day you run to God. Admit your selfishness and wrongdoing. Ask him to forgive you, knowing that Jesus died to pay the just penalty for your sin, resurrected for your eternal life. And accept his leadership in your life, which will enable you to turn from your ways to His.

What would you fill in for the next blank on your outline:

I’m counting on God’s grace to change \_\_\_\_\_

What are you counting on God's grace to change? You can begin a new life today. You can begin a fresh start.

### **Conclusion**

I trust, today, that your asking God to straighten out your life.