

Grace for the Oppressed

Grace in Jesus' Genealogy

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Bible Text: Matthew 1:1-16; Genesis 38

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Today is the first week of our Christmas series where we're going to be focusing specifically on grace from the genealogy of Jesus Christ and, in particular, we're going to be thinking about four of the women listed in that genealogy and what we can learn about grace in the process. Now, you might be thinking like, "What? I mean, seriously? Grace from a genealogy? I mean, like, I skip those when I'm reading the Bible. I mean, how is it possible that we can find grace in the midst of a genealogy?" Well, I'd like you to take your program and on the note page is actually printed the first part of Matthew 1 and I'd like to go ahead and begin simply by reading that portion of the passage. It says, Matthew 1:1,

1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. 3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. 4 Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. 5 Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. 6 Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.

Now we'll skip to verse 16,

16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Now, Matthew puts this genealogy at the beginning of his Gospel for a reason. You see, there was an important reality to genealogies in the ancient times. They, in essence, served as a resume, if you will, of who a person was. Genealogies connected a person to his or her history and history was important for the way in which that person was going to serve in society. For example, priests had to be from the tribe of Levi. In fact, they not only had to be from the tribe of Levi, they had to be from a specific son of Levi. In the book of Ezra after the exile, a group of men were rejected as priests simply because they

could not prove their history. They said, "We want to be priests." They said, "Well, show us the records. Demonstrate to us that you have the proper lineage, the proper history," and they were unable to do so and so they were rejected. You see, a genealogy was basically a resume, if you will, that qualified one for a particular task.

In the Christmas story, we find a census was taken and Joseph had to register in Bethlehem because that was the location of his family registry. Why couldn't he just get that done from where he was? He had to travel to Bethlehem for a reason. Knowing his history was a big deal, much bigger than in our day.

But some genealogies are even more important than that because not only do they provide somewhat of a resume, but sometimes they make very important Old Testament connections, like this to show who God's promised serpent crushing seed of Genesis 3:15 might be. All the way back in Genesis 3, we know that the Messiah, a deliverer, would come and we know that when he was going to come he would crush the head of Satan, but in the process his heel would be bruised. And Matthew is writing for the purpose of explaining that Jesus is the King, the Messiah, the one who was promised long ago to offer the kingdom of God and here is his resume, if you will, so that he's not just simply providing some sort of self-promotional material for Jesus, instead he is laying out the credibility that, yes, in fact, Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has been promised long ago. And whenever the New Testament writer uses an Old Testament illustration or even the name of an Old Testament individual, he invites you, that is, the reader, to go on a little journey. It's an invitation to recap the story of that particular person. In seminary we call this antecedent theology. It means that the writer is taking us back to what came before and is now drawing some sort of conclusion or some sort of important point from that history.

So when he says Abraham, what do we remember? We remember the story of Abraham. So when he says Jesus, the Messiah, here is his genealogy, the Son of David, the son of Abraham, we say, "Oh, wait a minute. I know the story of Abraham. Abraham was promised land and seed and blessing," and we're going to find out that that blessing was not just personal blessing but it was going to be the blessing through whom all nations were blessed and that would be, in fact, Jesus Christ, and Matthew wants us to make that connection.

David. David is a crucial figure because God promised that one of David's descendants would reign on his throne how long? How long is it? Forever. Forever. Not anybody is just qualified to do that. Only the Messiah could fit that calling and thus Matthew wants to make it very clear that Jesus, the King, the Messiah, the Son of God, is the one promised in the Old Testament and when it comes to his lineage, there are some major heavy-hitters in the list: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David.

But Jesus' genealogy, his resume, if you will, also includes some rather surprising names and these, quite frankly, are names that if you were trying to impress your audience you might just want to choose to leave out. I mean, have you ever left something out of your resume? You say, "Do you know what? I think I'll just not talk about that one." Well,

that's exactly what you might find here except God in his sovereignty decides to tell us about them.

Tamar. Well, Tamar's an interesting individual. She became a prostitute, committed incest and, you know, if that's a big deal or not, well, all you've got to do is read Leviticus 20:12, it says, "If there is a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death." Or what about Rahab who was a Canaanite prostitute? Or what about Ruth, a Moabite foreigner? Well, is being a foreigner a big deal? Check out Deuteronomy 23, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter into the assembly of the Lord." Period. Or what about Bathsheba, an adulteress with David the king? No, this is a number of ladies who are listed here who don't exactly have really clean resumes so how is it possible for these folks, these particular ladies specifically, although the men, certain of them, are not any better, how is it possible for them to be in the family of Jesus, the divine Son of God? Then we might ask: how is it possible for you and me to be in the family of Jesus? And here's the answer to that question: grace is going to have to break through and save. Grace is going to have to break through and save.

Now, with the time that I have left, I'm going to take Matthew's invitation and I like for you to join me in that invitation and go back and study the story of Tamar. Please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 38. That's on page 29 of the front section of the Bible in the chair in front of you. Page 29, Genesis 38. We're going to be thinking about the concept of grace for the oppressed. Grace for the oppressed.

You will remember, as you're getting there, that this is part of the Joseph story. His slavery and ultimate exaltation in Egypt surrounds these events and so in the middle of this Joseph story, there is this little interlude to tell us about Judah and this woman named Tamar. Genesis 38, beginning in verse 1,

1 And it came about at that time, that Judah departed from his brothers and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. 2 Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her. 3 So she conceived and bore a son and he named him Er. 4 Then she conceived again and bore a son and named him Onan. 5 She bore still another son and named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.

6 Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life. 8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." 9 Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother. 10 But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He took his life also. 11 Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my

son Shelah grows up"; for he thought, "I am afraid that he too may die like his brothers." So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

12 Now after a considerable time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 It was told to Tamar, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." 14 So she removed her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face. 16 So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, "Here now, let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" 17 He said, therefore, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." She said, moreover, "Will you give a pledge until you send it?" 18 He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him. 19 Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow's garments.

20 When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. 21 He asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no temple prostitute here." 22 So he returned to Judah, and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, 'There has been no temple prostitute here.'" 23 Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I sent this young goat, but you did not find her."

24 Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" 25 It was while she was being brought out that she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" 26 Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not have relations with her again.

27 It came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb. 28 Moreover, it took place while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." 29 But it came about as he drew

back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. Then she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez. 30
Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand;
and he was named Zerah.

Well, all I've got to say to you is Merry Christmas after that one, huh? I mean, is that not a cool Christmas story or what? Well, here's what I'd like us to do: think about from this text three ways in which God breaks through the world of oppression. God breaks through. You see, the terminology "breaking through" is actually going to come from the name Perez which means "to break through." He broke through, if you will, the oppression that his brother was trying to put on him by getting out first.

Here's the first thing I'd like us to see: God's grace breaks through for those who are oppressed. For those who are oppressed. This is particularly highlighted by Tamar. You see, as you begin to think about Tamar, one of the things you realize pretty quickly is there may be more to an individual's lowly situation than their sin. Imagine if I had simply told you that there is a woman in the genealogy of Christ who prostituted herself to her father-in-law. You might be thinking, "Well, that's unbelievable. I mean, that's maybe even disgusting. How is it that her name could possibly be mentioned in the line of Christ? I mean, why wouldn't she just simply be excluded? Not included in the text of Matthew 1?" You see, here is one of the realities: we're often quick to become judgmental because we don't know or take the time to know the whole story and when the story and the gaps of the story get filled in, a very different picture emerges. You see, I'm not suggesting that Tamar was sinless here, nor am I suggesting that the next time you feel wronged you should take matters into your own hands like she did, but when we study the Bible, we often have to ask questions like: what is descriptive and what is prescriptive? And for now, I'm simply suggesting that in this case there was more, a lot more to Tamar's story than simply that she prostituted herself to her father-in-law.

Here are just a few facts. Tamar was a young girl pledged to marry Judah's son. Women in that day and culture did not have many opportunities for personal advancement and so marriage was a key source of provision and protection for women. A man was now going to assume responsibility for her and like any bride, I'm sure she was thankful and excited for the good days that were on the horizon. However, Tamar marries a man who is so wicked God actually kills him. I mean, God is patient, God is kind, but he's also a God who brings discipline at appropriate times and in this case, Er we're told in verses 6 and 7, was so bad that God chose to kill him. Can you imagine Tamar's marriage to a guy like that? I mean, I know for a fact I'm not exactly easy to live with. I mean, I am a moron of epic proportions. I get that. You could pray for Stephanie, she certainly could use it. But can you imagine Tamar's marriage? I mean, your husband, your wife, may not be perfect but this is pretty rough, huh? Wait, this guy apparently was not the lover, learner, leader that he needed to be, was he? So much so that God decides that he's going to take his life. Who knows how much suffering Tamar experienced from a man that was so wicked that God actually killed him.

So now what? Tamar is a widow and the only thing worse than being an unmarried woman was being a widow because now your chances of properly being cared for have been drastically reduced. After all, who wants to pay the bride price for a woman who has already been someone else's bride? And so in that time, God actually made a provision. It's codified in Deuteronomy 25:5 where we find that part of God's righteousness was lived out in the nation of Israel that if a brother died and there was an unmarried brother, then the unmarried brother was responsible to raise up children on behalf of his older brother. That was part of the righteousness of God, if you will, and so therefore the second son has the responsibility to give Tamar a son for the purpose of carrying on the line of his older brother, except that son does not do his responsibility. So Tamar may have been thinking, "Alright, great, well, I'm sad that my first husband is dead but I'm glad that I get to be cared for and protected in my society and I'm glad that I'm going to have the second one." Except he refuses to do what is necessary to create a pregnancy. Can you imagine what would be going through Tamar's mind? "I'm given in marriage to the first guy who is so bad God kills him. Then I get his brother who brings on suffering on me as well and then God kills him too. Man, I cannot win for losing."

Then what? Well, here's the next plan: go live in your parents house and put on widow's garments. Boy, that's exciting, isn't it? How would you like to dress every day claiming your identity, "Hey, I am a widow. Check out the clothes that I'm wearing." How would you like to be broadcast to the public society all the stuff that's going on in your life? And yet that's exactly what happens to Tamar. She now has to live as a widow. She now has to dress with widow's clothes. She now has to go back and live in her parents' house.

Then what? Judah says, "Alright, alright, I get it. One son is dead, two sons are dead. Now, there is still a third one so here's what I want you to do: I want you to just wait until he grows up," because apparently he's too young for marriage at this particular time and so she must wait and yet here is yet another source of oppression. Judah is so ignorant about his own spiritual life at this point that even though two of his three sons were so evil and so wicked that God had to kill them, and he blames her. Do you see the math that he did? Here was the math he came up with: "Let's see, two sons, one daughter-in-law and you're still alive. That must mean it's your fault. That must mean it's your responsibility." So now he blames her and he sets up this plan that says, in essence, "Look, here's what's going to happen: you hang out at your father's house, put on the widow's garments and we'll wait for my third son to grow up," which is like, when? Never going to happen.

You know, Pastor Viars encouraged us on this point last week with respect to the statistics on the north side of Lafayette, that there is more poverty, more marital failure, more single moms barely making it, more diversity, more tension, and one of the tempting things to do is to simply assume that they're just simply facing the consequences of bad decisions. I mean, one of the options, one of the places that a person could go is say, "Do you know what? When you act foolish, don't be surprised if you pay the consequences for being a fool."

I once saw a little joke: the lottery is a tax on those who are bad at math. I thought that was pretty funny. Look, those who drink alcohol get special taxes that those who don't drink alcohol don't have to pay. Those who smoke have taxes that people who don't smoke don't have to pay. Those who drive a car have to pay taxes on gasoline that those who choose to ride their bike don't have to pay. Then the lottery is a tax on those who don't understand probability and statistics. That was kind of the joke. But, you know, rather than going down trails like that, maybe some of the people that we're trying to reach are a bit more like Tamar where the outside might not be the whole story. In fact, it might be a rather small part of the whole story. And rather than condemn Tamar which the Lord could have done, he actually decides to do something else. You see, our God sees the entirety of the circumstances and, at times, chooses to exalt the lowly.

You see, the first part of Genesis 38 just simply described Tamar's situation. Here's a period of years. She's given to one husband. She's given to a second husband. Now she's forced to go and live back at her father's house, demonstrating that she is, in fact, a widow. Then she realizes that, according to verse 12, a considerable time has passed and now Judah's wife dies. The time for mourning is over and she recognizes that, "Look, the reality is that I'm never going to get that son. I was told that I was going to get him but the fact of the matter is that he's grown up now." So we shouldn't see this story as a matter of here was day one and she got married, then God decided to kill her first husband. And then she got married the second day and God decided to kill her second husband. And then she lived three or four days at the house and then she got the third one. No, no, no, we're talking years.

We're talking years where the series of events are taking place and now, after a considerable time, verse 12, Judah's wife dies. She recognizes that she is not going to be given the younger son and so now what she decides to do is to say, "Well, I'm trapped. I have no options anymore because here's the reality: I'm a widow; I'm pledged to this other guy who I'm never going to get and I'm going to be forced to live in my father's house." Talk about being between a rock and a hard place. So the choice that she makes is that she dresses up as a prostitute.

Now, here's one of the interesting things about this passage: isn't it interesting that the plan worked? Isn't it interesting that the plan worked? You know, it may be what you might have expected is as Judah was traveling along in his journeys and he sees this woman who is clearly acting like a harlot, it's obvious, she dresses in a way that makes that point perfectly clear, you might think that he would say, "Well, do you know what? Maybe that's a woman who might actually need to be cared for. Maybe I ought to try to do something for her for the purpose of helping her not be in that position anymore." But is that what happens? Not at all. It is interesting that the plan actually works. Maybe that's because Judah had a history of this. Maybe she knew her father-in-law a whole lot better than what we like to think. And maybe these years of spending time in this family had demonstrated something about Judah's character that she had not had certainly known and was willing to take advantage of.

So now a pregnancy occurs. That was supposed to happen with Onan, remember? But here's where the story gets really interesting because in verse 24 it says, "Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, 'Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot.'" So in other words, now that she's actually beginning to show. Now that the pregnancy is becoming obvious to everyone Judah is informed that his daughter-in-law is pregnant from prostitution.

So what does Judah say? Does Judah say, "Well, do you know what? The fact of the matter is that I really should have given my son, like I told her I would, maybe it's I should keep my nose out of somebody else's business." Where is she living? Her father's house. Instead he says, "Well, bring her out and let her be burned!" Not only is he ready to bring about justice, why the burning? Where does that come from? What law was he referring to in not just executing her but burning her? Maybe there's a sense in which this text is telling us that Judah was not just simply interested in killing his daughter-in-law, maybe he was interested in revenge.

So Judah finally recognizes because Tamar had kept the ring and the staff and the seal, and she sends it back to him and she says, "Well, okay, yeah, it's true I did play the harlot but here's the person who impregnated me. It's the one who owns these things." And according to verse 25 she says, "Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" Now, you might be thinking to yourself, "Well, wait a minute, I've read the Bible. I've seen that before. Where did that come from? Oh yeah, that's exactly what Judah did when he handed Jacob, his father, Joseph's coat filled with blood and said, 'Father, please examine these to see if these are your son's.'" Oh yeah, that's right. You know, sometimes in the midst of reading the Bible you don't really necessarily see all these connections and yet they're there, huh? Judah takes the lead in selling off Joseph. Judah takes the lead in bringing this garment to his father. He takes the lead in saying, "Father, hey, please examine," Genesis 37:32, "please examine. Check it out and see what you find."

When Judah realizes the wickedness of his heart he says, "She is more righteous than I." Now admittedly, Judah's righteousness is not a very high standard, huh? I mean, the guy marries a foreigner. That's like wrong. He raises two boys who hate God. That's like wrong. He blames Tamar for the death of his wicked sons. That's like wrong. He lies to Tamar to trap her in a very vulnerable position. That's like wrong. He self-righteously judges her and seeks to kill her. That's like wrong too. But what we have happen here is a divine reversal, that is Tamar's shame, her embarrassment, her hurt, her pain, her frustration is seen by God and even though Tamar is not sinless, God meets her where she is and he pours out his grace upon her.

Friends, God knew about all that. God knew that her prostitution was not even close to the whole story and rather than simply condemn her for her sin, God poured out his grace upon her. He gave her two sons. She wasn't going to have any. God looked upon her affliction and he reversed her son and instead of dying as a widow without children, God put her in the line of Christ.

Now, let's come back to our discussion of our community. Is it possible for a minute that God views some of the folks in our community in a similar way to the way he views Tamar? Is it possible that since God knows the whole story he will pour out his grace and reverse their situation? Is it possible that God wants to use us as instruments to help and to reverse these situations? If you were here for the stewardship banquet then you heard one of the better lines of that night where a little boy in a Lincoln neighborhood asked Pastor Johnny, "Hey, can you come back tomorrow and play with me? Could you come back tomorrow and play with me?" Maybe his affliction is a little bit more than his sin, huh? Maybe God wants the Hartford Hub to be a central location where he plans to pour out his grace on the Tamars of this town. Maybe God wants you to be the grace filled instrument in his hand during the holiday season when you're around your sinful relatives. Maybe God wants you to see them through the grid of Tamar rather than through the grid of judgmental Judah. Maybe God wants you to be the grace filled instrument in his hand in your workplace where some of the people in your work may be pretty sinful characters but God wants you to see them as Tamars.

I find it very interesting that years later, the elders are speaking to a man named Boaz. He's going to be marrying another woman, her name is Ruth, who will also be in the line of Christ. That will be mentioned in a later sermon. But the elders of the city after giving them approval to be married, they simply say this, "Boaz and Ruth, may God bless you like he blessed Judah and Tamar." Isn't that a fascinating passage? Ruth 4:18. Isn't that a fascinating statement that that's what they would say? And they're saying this, "Look, we know this isn't exactly how it's supposed to go down. Boaz, you're supposed to marry some really awesome Israelite girl. Instead you're marrying a foreigner. That's not really how it's supposed to go but we see the hand of God in this situation and we want grace to break through all of this mess," that is, the Boaz/Ruth mess, "just like we saw God break through the Judah/Tamar mess too," which was seven generations earlier. And they're simply saying, "Hey, may God bless you, Boaz and Ruth, just as God blessed Judah and Tamar."

Now, here's a second thing we find in the text: God's grace breaks through in granting repentance for the oppressors. For the oppressors. You see, Genesis 38 is not just about Tamar. There is another person in the story and that's Judah and what we learn is that God's grace is active with Judah as well. His hardness, in fact, had grown over time. Not only does Judah serve as the individual, the spearhead who comes up with the plan to sell Joseph, not only does he show his father the bloody clothes, not only does he marry a Canaanite, not only does he raise two wicked sons, not only does he refuse to honor the commitment that he made to Tamar, not only is he willing to seek a prostitute with no remorse. In fact, verse 23 says, "Hey look, you tried, but let's not let the word out. You tried to bring the goat but let's just not let the word out." You can understand that, can't you? Can you imagine that story? "Yeah, I hired a prostitute for a goat but, well, I didn't have a goat on me and so I gave her my ring and cord and staff for the purpose of, you know, as a pledge until I could get her the goat." And people would be like, "Well, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute, wait a minute, what did you just say? Did you say that you hired a prostitute for a goat but you didn't have a goat with you? I mean, seriously?" He's right. He's simply saying, "Hey look, I don't want this word to get out because I really

will be a laughingstock." Friends, Judah's a long way from the Lord. He's become callous and he's become callous to everyone, Tamar included.

So what we could see is God could just simply kill him just like he killed his sons too. "Do you know what? You're wicked just like the boys that you raised so why don't I just take you out?" Yet that's not what he does. Instead, he reaches to the self-righteous Judah just like he reached to Tamar and here in God's rebuking his grace that can lead to repentance. In other words, what God does is God rebukes him in his grace but leads him to the point of repentance. Verse 26 was a watershed moment for Judah, incredibly important moment. When Judah recognized them, he makes this pronouncement, "She is more righteous than I because I was a liar. I said that I was going to give her my other son and I knew I wasn't going to do it and I am caught red-handed now. It's me. It's my fault."

You see, up to this point, Judah had blamed Joseph for his own jealousy. He had sold him to the slave traders. Judah deceived his father. Judah blames Tamar for the death of his sons. Threatens to burn her in the process. But now in this moment, God reaches out to Judah and as we fast forward this story, remember, it's part of the Joseph story and as you fast forward this part of the story, you realize that 22 years later when the brothers are standing in front of the exalted Joseph and Joseph says, "Do you know what? I think I'm going to keep Benjamin. Go ahead and go home. I'm going to keep Benjamin for myself." It was a test. It was a test to see if any of his brothers had changed. It was a test to see whether or not there was any remorse whatsoever for what they had done and who steps up to the plate and says, "No way, you cannot keep Benjamin. You have to take me instead"? It's Judah, isn't it? You see, this little story reminds us not only of what God did in Tamar's life, it reminds us of what God did in Judah's life. He brings Judah to the place of repentance as well.

Now, let's go back to the book of Matthew. God's grace breaks through fully in Judah and Tamar's seed, that is through Jesus Christ. You see, what I suggested to you earlier is that Matthew includes the names of these individuals because he's asking you, he's inviting you, to go back and read their story. Go back and read about Abraham. Go back and read about David. Go back and read about Judah and Tamar. Two people desperately in need of God's grace. And that's part of the resume of Jesus the King, the Messiah, the Son of God. You see, it's with this background in mind. God was saving through Jesus Christ. He's going to save the people like the Judahs of the world, that is the oppressors, as well as the Tamars of the world, the ones who are oppressed. You see, he pronounces those oppressed righteous by faith and takes upon himself their unrighteousness. You see, when Christ who is the King, the Messiah, the Son of God, came to accomplish his first mission to die on the cross to make reconciliation with God possible, he did this for the Tamars of the world. And Jesus himself will say that, "I did not come to those who don't need me. I came to those who needed help. I came as a physician to those who were sick." Christ came to give righteousness to the ones who were oppressed and in the process he took our shame and he reversed it just like he did for Tamar.

So, friends, can I encourage you? If there has never been a time in your life where you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, can I encourage you to do that today? And if you're thinking, "Well, you don't know my past. Or you don't know how much that I have really suffered." Can I encourage you that it's really kind of like Tamar. Look at the story of Tamar. That's exactly the kind of person that Jesus Christ came to save. He welcomes the oppressed. All that he asks is that you acknowledge your sin for what it is and you repent and you trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But then also, he also grants the opportunity of repentance to us, that is, the oppressors. You see, when we start thinking about the Judahs of the world, our mind could quickly go to the Apostle Paul who was a persecutor of the church and yet God's grace reached him too.

Friends, it's hard to believe but the pattern that we see is set all the way back in Genesis. An oppressed woman redeemed. An oppressed man redeemed. It's a reminder of God's grace and how it reaches far beyond the place of sin. So while thankfulness is an appropriate response to sharing that message, I want to encourage you to get your family together and explain why you're doing things like giving to the Hartford Hub, because there are Judahs and Tamars over there. Why you're serving in Living Nativity, because there's going to be people who drive through the Living Nativity who are the Judah and Tamars of the world. Why is it you're participating in Christmas for Everyone? Because there are Judah and Tamars of the world and you want God's grace to break through all of that mess and reach them just like it's reached you.

So how is it possible for these folks to be in the family of Jesus, the divine Son of God? How is that possible? Because grace breaks through and saves, that's how. You know, we have a lot to be thankful for. We have a lot to give too. We have a very important mission to accomplish and I hope that one of the things that you're doing is just praising and thanking God and seeking to see the grace that's available in this genealogy as reaching out to every one of us. It reminded me of the words of a very famous hymn, "The Wonderful Matchless Grace of Jesus." Do you remember that old hymn? The chorus goes like this,

"Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea;
Wonderful grace, all sufficient for me, for even me.
Broader than the scope of my transgressions,
Greater far than all my sin and shame,
O magnify the precious Name of Jesus. [And do what?]
Praise His Name!"

Lord, thank you so much for your amazing grace and, Lord, we've seen that in the Judah/Tamar story which you chose to put in the genealogy of Christ. Lord, I pray that it would help us. It would help us, first of all, to be thankful people ourselves for the wonderful matchless grace of Jesus that reached us. Then, Lord, that it would also help us as we seek to reach the lost, knowing, Lord, that there are oppressed individuals all around us and there are oppressors all around us and we're asking, Lord, that you would

please use us to reach them with your amazing grace. We ask for your help in Christ's name. Amen.