

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH – SERMON 4

ABOUNDING SIN, SUPERABOUNDING GRACE

Genesis 38

INTRODUCTION

- There are some portions of Scripture that record events and deeds which some may find difficult reading.
- It must be remembered that while the entirety of Scripture is pure and holy, it also contains accounts of the depraved acts of sinful men.
- The many unflattering records of Israel's history are evidence that the Bible was not merely composed by Jewish writers, but is of divine authorship.
- In their studies of Genesis, many would prefer to skip this chapter.
- *“Entirely unsuited to homiletical use, much as the devout Bible student may glean from the chapter.”* (H C Leupold)
- However, “all scripture...is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16) and “written...for our learning” (Romans 15:4)
- Genesis 38 is important historically:
 - ✓ It gives insight into the unusual roots of the royal tribe of Judah

- ✓ It provides background to the character of Judah, who plays a significant role later in the narrative
- It is important spiritually:
 - ✓ It warns us of the dangers of temptation, and the awful consequences of yielding to it
 - ✓ It gives proof that even the most ungodly who will humbly repent, may be transformed and bear righteous fruit
 - ✓ It is a revelation of the matchless grace of God toward the most unworthy sinners
- These events took place over the 20+ years while Joseph was in Egypt
- Joseph was 17 when sold to Egypt (Genesis 37:2), and 39 when reunited with his brothers (Genesis 45:6)
- Judah and Tamar are the main characters in this chapter, and provide us a graphic lesson of man's abounding sin, as well as God's superabounding grace (Romans 5:20-21)

I. HE FRIENDED DEFILING COMPANIONS (1-6)

A. Departure from godly influence (1)

1. This is a descent, not merely topographically, but morally (cf. Genesis 12:10; Judges 14:1)

2. Gross immorality begins with seemingly small steps away from the narrow path.

B. Friendship with the ungodly (1)

1. Evil communications corrupts good manners (1 Corinthians 15:33)

C. Mixed marriage (2-6)

1. Judah knew this was forbidden
 - a. Abraham would not allow Isaac to marry a Canaanite (Genesis 24:3)
 - b. Isaac forbade Jacob from marrying a Canaanite (Genesis 28:1)
 - c. Esau's marriage to Canaanite women was a grief to his parents (Genesis 26:34-35)
 - d. Judah became the first of the chosen line to marry a stranger
2. God prohibited His people from marrying strangers for their own protection (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)
3. The Israelites were repeatedly turned to idolatry by intermarrying with the heathen (1 Kings 11; Nehemiah 13:23-31; Ezra 9-10)
4. Christians must marry "only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14)

II. HE FATHERED DESPICABLE CHILDREN (7-11)

A. What the parents indulge in moderation, the children will in excess

1. Judah's selfishness and carnality were abundant in his sons
2. Er was so wicked that God killed him
3. Ornan's sin was his selfish refusal to raise up a family to perpetuate his dead brother's name (called "levirate marriage" – Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 4:5)

B. Judah's response

1. He is ignorant as to the reasons why his sons died, blaming Tamar
2. He unjustly restrains Tamar from remarrying, promising her his other son while intending to defraud her

III. HE FELL TO DEEPEST CORRUPTION (12-23)

A. Judah's pursuit of worldly pleasure

1. Sheep shearing season was a time of celebrating and feasting
2. Remember – the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting (Ecclesiastes 7:2)

3. His pursuit of an apparent harlot reveals his lasciviousness

B. Tamar's scheme

1. She had a legitimate desire for children
2. She may also, having some knowledge and belief of the true religion, desired to enter into the Abrahamic promises, and be mother or ancestor of the Messiah
3. Yet her actions were evil, even if her intentions were good
4. "It's never right to do wrong to do right"

C. Judah's sin

1. Judah, having deceived his father with a garment, is now himself deceived by with a garment
2. He left his personal signet, bracelets and staff as a deposit for the harlot, until full payment could be made
3. He feared being shamed among men more than he feared sinning against God
 - a. Reputation is what men think you are; character is what you truly are
 - b. The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching.

- c. All sin is against God, whether men know of it or not (Psalm 51:4)

IV. HE FINALLY DEMONSTRATED CONTRITION (24-26)

A. His vehement judgment (24)

1. Judah, as the head of the family, had power of life and death over those in it
2. He pronounced the common punishment for adultery – burning
3. We are often the most severe in condemning sins in others, which we allow in ourselves (2 Samuel 12:5; Romans 2:1-2)

B. His sin exposed (25)

C. His repentant confession (26)

1. This moment is not just a pivotal moment in Judah's life, but *the* pivotal moment.
2. He now confesses his own unrighteousness
3. Judah demonstrated his genuine repentance by the fact that he "he knew her again no more" (v.26)
4. It appears that he never remarried after this
5. From this point on, Judah is altogether another man (Genesis 44:33; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

V. THEY FOUND DIVINE CLEMENCY (27-30)

- A. From their immoral union, the Lord granted them children
 - 1. Not one child only, but twins
 - 2. From Pharez would come the royal line

- B. Tamar's name is used favourably in genealogies
 - 1. Her name is used as part of the blessing pronounced upon Boaz and Ruth by the people of Bethlehem (Ruth 4:11-12)
 - 2. She is one of four women listed in Christ's genealogy as recorded by Matthew (with Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba)
 - a. It was not necessary to list any women in such a genealogy
 - b. For a woman to be listed was unusual and noteworthy

- C. God's grace is magnified in such people
 - 1. Man's choice is of appearance and merit
 - 2. God's choice is of grace
 - 3. God accepts sinners, not by their works, but by His grace given upon their repentance

4. We also see the condescension of the sinless son of God, by being born to such a lineage, “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3)
5. He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Hebrews 2:11)
6. We are all utterly unworthy sinners, and our only hope of being named amongst the redeemed is God’s grace

CONCLUSION

1. Are the friends and companions you choose drawing you closer to God, or away from God?
2. Have you ever acknowledged your wickedness before God and cried to Him for mercy, for Christ’s sake?
3. Does your life give evidence of the transforming power of God’s saving grace within you?