

Judah, Tamar, and Social Justice

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MAIN VERSES

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Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love? A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God? Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home.

Shabbat Shalom: Welcome and Context

Shabbat Shalom, everybody. We're so glad that we can be back this week as we continue our series on awkwardness. And I know it got off to a great start last time we met. We chose to actually move this series up as opposed to, say, our upcoming series on Revelation, and there was an intentional reason for that. Although Revelation is a great study for a time of uncertainty, and Revelation is a book about hope in the face of actual persecution and uncertainty, we also wanted to remind the community that there is still a life outside of the ideas of uncertainty, and there's still a common kindness and love that exists in the world that we have access to. You can still show love and kindness in this world right now, even though you can't see someone's mouth because they have a mask on.

During this time, we are covering up more, and the one thing I see that's neat is that although we cannot always communicate with our facial expressions, something that we do very well in the South, whether we like to or not, we adapt. And I saw a police officer speaking to another person earlier this week, and they were both wearing, of course, a mask. And almost as if to compensate for not being able to portray the friendly emotions of smiling or smirking, both of them just naturally exaggerated their arm and head movements. And it was so funny to watch because it shows that we are willing to increase awkward dramatization in order to convey our attitudes of kindness and friendliness towards another person.

Yeah, I just love that. But it stinks wearing a mask, especially if you've just drank coffee. And the thing is, a mask should not stop the fruit of the Spirit being manifest. It's just a piece of paper. It doesn't control your spirit. It doesn't control anything. People just can't see your mouth. So you can still have access. This is not diminishing your ability to be an image bearer to the world around you.

Race, Diversity, and Awkward Conversations

We had an awkward encounter the other day, and race in America is such an awkward and almost cringeworthy topic right now due to recent events. And before that, there is a lot going on, and people of all races are seemingly learning how to talk about these issues face-to-face openly. And if you've been involved in one of those conversations recently, it can be awkward. Can be. Doesn't have to be. But sometimes it is, right? And that's not a bad thing. It's not a bad thing. But for some people, for some people, this is a brand new type of conversation that they're learning how to navigate. And that is a really, really good thing.

So we have our four-year-old, Benjamin, and Ben is amazing. And he's so excited. He genuinely loves people. And yes, I'm starting out a story that involves race and my four-year-old son. So let's see how this goes. This is going to be great.

So we are teaching Benjamin, to the best of our ability, to not ignore but to intentionally observe the differences in people around him—specifically, skin colors: lighter skin colors, darker skin colors, skin of different hues, and so on. And the point we've been trying to teach him is just how beautiful the diversity and the variety of the people that God created are. That's where we're starting as the foundation for the world that he lives in.

Benjamin's Beautiful Observations

And we have two foster daughters. One of them has been with us for almost two years now. She is amazing, sassy, lover, but she's black. And this was not something that Ben noticed for the longest time. It really was not. That his sister had a completely different skin tone than he did.

So once he actually saw and noticed out in public that there were people in the world that didn't look as much like him as they did his little sister, he got super excited because he was learning how to match things up. Like, oh, wow. And so much so that it would not be uncommon for him to let people know in the grocery store what color skin they had because he was excited because that was the same color of skin that his sister had. So it's been fun for sure.

And our other foster daughter's caseworker came over the other week because foster parents have caseworkers that come by. And her caseworker is black and she has a darker complexion. And so what does Ben do as he's playing in the living room on the couch, jumping up and down? He looks at her with the friendliest face and he says, "Hey, you're dark," and just screams it out as he's playing.

And we don't know this caseworker very well, but at that moment, I froze. I froze because I'm waiting on Benjamin to finish his statement that I'm used to him finishing if or when he says something out of the blue like that. You know, you're dark, you're light, you're reddish, and that's so cool. Usually he's like, that's so beautiful, or that's so cool, or that's neat, because that's like my sister. But Ben is not finishing his normal sentence today. So I freeze and I observe the caseworker freeze and I'm struggling to understand what she might be thinking based on what this four-year-old has just said and what she might be thinking about us as his parents and why he said this.

And then I noticed maybe she's wondering what I'm thinking and now realizing that I'm thinking about what she's thinking about. And so now she might be worried about what I'm thinking about. She's thinking about what she's thinking about me. And this absolute vicious, awkward, cringeworthy cycle just builds and builds and builds. And during this half millisecond moment in time where it stood still, the sound waves from Benjamin's voice had traveled around the house to the kitchen where my wife was.

So during this moment, two grown adults are awkwardly waiting for the other to address this conversation that this wonderful four-year-old has just started. And she was so gracious. She smiled at Benjamin and she said, "Yes, I am." And Benjamin jumped on the couch, landed on his bottom. And he says, "Yeah, that's so cool." And he just runs off and keeps playing.

And meanwhile, I'm still standing there wondering how I'm going to follow up to this whole experience that lasted about 1.7 seconds. And I explained we're teaching Benjamin to observe diversity as a positive thing. And it's so amazing.

Children Have No Lines in the Sand

It's neat to think that children have no lines in the sand when it comes to conversations about skin color. It's not awkward for them. There's no fear to speak of it. Now, that's only for us mature adults, even as I speak. Why? Why? Well, because of the experiences we've had and what we've been taught in all of our circles about the topic. And I think as adults, many times

we have these experiences, whether in action or conversation on how we should see the world. And through time, the hope is that humanity evolves.

Through time, humanity goes through a transition and becomes better, in my opinion. And if you know me, you know my eschatological view is that Christianity is on a trajectory to make the world a better place. That's just what I believe. That's what I read in the Bible. I believe the world is a better place since Jesus than before. I don't believe it's getting worse. But from my theology, we are to be ambassadors of the kingdom of God on earth. We are to be the embassy of heaven on earth.

Ambassadors of Heaven

And many churches talk about being the hands and feet of Jesus. And we love to talk about that. But what does that mean? It means that we're called to represent Jesus to the world. Like when people see us, they need to see and feel the actualized love of Christ in their midst. That's what our mission is. We're called to do something to make the world a better place.

And so I see the world getting better from where it was. One small step at a time. One small decision at a time. One small, bold, passionate response at a time. We are called as believers to progress the world towards the heaven that we represent. And when we choose to set aside our selfishness and our pride and our preconceived views on how the world should be, and allow ourselves to humbly walk forward for the betterment of humanity, I believe we progress in that mission.

The Bible starts with a garden, but it ends with a city. We're progressing towards a city. We're not going back to a garden necessarily. It's a trajectory. And when awkward scenarios pop up, when you are able to have a conversation about race with your white or your black or your Asian or your Hispanic or any other diverse group, I feel that it's an invitation to enter into a better world.

Embrace the Awkward

Embrace the awkward. Embrace it. It's the doorway to something better. Because it's an opportunity to grow. God wants us to grow. God wants us to be more just, more loving, more merciful, and a people of hope. God is always calling us forward.

And sometimes we like to be still, to hear his voice. It's a big popular thing, and it's scripturally based. But please don't use that to be still in who you are called to be. How are you being called

to stretch yourself right now so that you can grow, so that you can mature as a believer?

I love the idea of listening and stopping and being still to hear the voice of God, the voice of the Holy Spirit. It's an awesome way to learn from Elijah's narrative and how he overcame it. But that's not an excuse to drop your weapon in the midst of battle.

You keep pushing. You have orders. We've been given the orders. And so that's my awkward story. That should have never been awkward, but that's the thing. And I'm so thankful for the generosity of our caseworker. She's amazing. And how she handled Benjamin's development of understanding the world around him. So right now, guys, I would love to hear from you. After the message, I like to read the comments. And so if you would post a comment below just telling me: do you have an awkward moment in your life that ended positively? So after the awkwardness went through, and it was so weird, it could have been admitting you're wrong at something. That's awkward, but it always leads to something better. Some type of awkward scenario that ended positively. I would love to read the comments afterwards. Please post below. Please use discretion as well, or else it'll get deleted.

Awkward Transitions and Awkward Stories

So we are now going to awkwardly transition to the message, which really isn't connected to this story at all. So there we go. This week, I was thinking about awkward stories in the Bible. And I know we went through last week, we spoke about Adam and Eve and [Genesis 4](#). And hey, honey, did you realize we're not wearing any clothes? Hey, you're right, we're not wearing any clothes. Definitely awkward. And we spoke about how we try to hide ourselves in the face of the reality that surrounds us sometimes. We love to run from the reality when it doesn't match up with what we thought it was. When we look at ourselves in the mirror and that's not the person we thought we looked like, but that's actually the person that people see, and we love to run from that. And that's exactly what we discussed last week.

There's also that awkward moment in the story. We might touch on this next week where Jacob gets married, right? She's a beautiful bride and they get married and then they hug. And then he wakes up in the morning and it's actually his bride's sister. How do you even begin a conversation after that? Definitely a cringeworthy moment among the most cringeworthy stories of the Bible. But today—today I want to land on the story of Judah and Tamar. It's going to be a bit of a more mature message, parents. So this story is so jam-packed, and if you remember last year, we really dove into an in-depth study on this that was based on Professor Robert Alter's commentary in our message, "How Jesus Read the Bible." I think that was last

year. Today, we're going to look at what I believe is a little bit different angle, but one that the biblical authors definitely wanted us to see.

Genesis 38: The Oddly Placed Story

So a little background on [Genesis 38](#): as we discussed in the message from last year, the story of Judah and Tamar takes place here, and it's a very odd place when you're reading the whole book of Genesis because it is placed right smack awkwardly in the middle of the story of Joseph. And what takes place in the story is that Joseph has just been thrown in a pit by his brothers, and they sold him into slavery. So you turn the page. What's going to happen next? I mean, what's going to happen next? Okay, so they sold Joseph, their brother, and then Judah left and got married, and he had a family, and he had some sons, and then they grew up. And here's the story. Then he did wrong against his daughter-in-law, and she dressed up, and that's just so awkward. It's like, what just happened? Where is the biblical author taking us? We just jumped off a cliff into another story altogether. And those dynamics—we discussed in last year's message, "How Jesus Read the Bible."

So let's go ahead and review the Judah and Tamar story so we can get a little bit of insight into some of the awkwardness, some of the cringeworthiness, and what I believe the point of the story may have been, especially for believers today.

Life Under Patriarchy

So [Genesis 38](#), this is about a patriarch named Judah. So why do we call this time period the time of the patriarchs in the Bible? Anybody? Because during this time, power, authority, property, management, inheritance—they were all managed by the oldest living male of each family. The oldest man was in charge. And if there was a dispute in the family, the oldest living male by default carried the most weight and final say to what was going to happen. Not the women. Not the women. So this was a time ruled by patriarchy. So here, this is a story about a patriarch. God in charge, Judah. And he's left his brothers, he's left his father, he's doing his own thing now. He is the patriarch of his family. He goes, he marries a nice Canaanite woman, and he has three sons. And when the oldest son, Ur, dies—I love that name, Ur. It's like you never have to even ask what kind of mood he's in.

When Ur was old enough to marry, Judah bought him a wife. That's how things worked back then with bride prices and such. Judah brought the wife back to his son. And Ur married a wife by the name of Tamar. It's a gripping narrative so far. What happens next? Here we go, [Genesis](#)

38, 7. Just a random fact, everybody: Ur did something bad and God killed him. I find the abruptness of the story so humorous. Great storytelling here because it just escalates everything so quickly. And I believe this is done intentionally by the author. If you're ever watching a movie, some things never change in story development. If one of the main characters gets killed off unexpectedly, abruptly, and just as if it was not a big deal, there was no leading up to it, what do you do? You grab your seat and pull in. What's going to happen now? What are the dynamics going to change? And that's exactly what's happened here. He wants this to be unforeseen, this abrupt moment that increases the drama of the entire story.

The Widow's Plight

Because what is the ancient reader going to be pondering here? Not us today. We're more concerned about, oh, I wonder what he did. And obviously it's not going to tell us because that's not important. He died. What would the ancient reader be pondering? What are they going to be concerned about? They're not going to be, oh, that's so sad about her. Why not? Who are they actually worried about? Well, what kind of society is it? Patriarchal. Is everybody included in the realm of privilege in this type of society? No. Who's left out? Women. They're right outside the circle, specifically widows. They are the ones who fall through the cracks in this society, especially if they don't have a husband, because now they don't have access to the inheritance. I mean, the daughters of Zelophehad, they haven't protested yet, right? This is bad. This is bad for Tamar. What's going to happen now? Tamar doesn't have any sons, so no inheritance, no support is coming her way by default.

That's why the story of Abraham and Hagar is so weighty. And that's why it tries to highlight the injustice that happens to Hagar and Ishmael. Abram and Sarah essentially use Hagar as a sex slave, and then they kick her and her child out, just abandon her. There's nowhere to go. They don't have anything. They have no advocates in society. There's no social security check that they're going to get. There's no food stamps. They're kicked out in the desert. I don't think they even have a camel to ride to the nearest town. They're just there. They're kicked out, and it's horrible.

God's Compassion for the Forgotten

And God is the one that comes to their rescue. And I hate seeing people use the story to somehow predict end times, especially when it comes to Muslim domination, as if Ishmael is this grand evil person in the story. Ishmael and Hagar are victims in the story. They are the slaves. And their owners not only abused them, but abandoned them to be lost forever, to fall

through the cracks forever. And so what does Yahweh, that God, the God that is a father to the fatherless—[Psalm 68](#), 5—the God that shows love to foreigners and ensures that widows and orphans receive justice, as [Deuteronomy 10](#), 8 says, who is the keeper of the victims of abuse and injustice and the helper of the fatherless, as [Psalm 10](#), 14 does—what does Yahweh do when he hears the cry of Ishmael out in the middle of the desert and his mother Hagar? He fills his mandate to be that kind of God, that kind of father of creation, and that kind of king. He rescues them. He leads them to water. Not only that, he overcompensates them for the injustice through his covenant believers, his covenant followers. You will be a great nation.

That's why the central commandment in the Torah, repeated over and over and over again, that Israel fails at is: take care of the widows and orphans. Take care of the ones that fall through the cracks. That's what Amos brutally explains to both Israel and Judah. This is why you guys are going into exile. I rescued you from Egypt where you were the ones who fell through the cracks. And as a result, you have decided to go outside my Torah, build your nation up, and become the trophy of domination of the world. You have become the new Egypt, enslaving weaker nations around you. Guess what? I'm going to send you to be those people again. The people that you abuse, that fall through the cracks, guess what? You will be those people in Babylon.

The Enduring Commandment

New Testament—still, the commandment stays the same. Widows and orphans, but also lepers, those of sub-status, the lame who can't work, who just go begging in the street. Here's a quarter. Who did Jesus minister to? Oh yeah, it was the wealthy Pharisee's wife or the wealthy Pharisee, right? He was having a bad day at work. And so Yeshua went to minister to him, right? That was his audience.

No, he went to the people that those people forgot about. And when he does engage the people who lived a life of wealth and blessing and reminded them of those who were falling through the cracks, what is the result? Well, Zacchaeus, I have done wrong. I have abused those or ignored those that fall through the cracks. I will pay back four times and I will give everything. I will make this right to follow you.

The Law and the Widow

So here's a story. Ur dies. And what is the ancient audience thinking? They're thinking, oh no, what's going to happen to Tamar, this woman that just came into this family? Well, during this time, there were social laws set up to help protect widows. Specifically for this situation, there

were the Levirate Laws. And basically, these laws are in Torah as well as in Greater Mesopotamia. This is a common theme. Pretty much, if a husband dies and leaves behind a widow that doesn't have any children to gain his inheritance or children in his name, his brother will step up to the plate and marry her and have children in the name of his brother. That way, the inheritance can flow down and it will protect the widow. Yeah, end of the book of Ruth, if you notice. Boaz marrying Ruth wasn't to have a child in his name. It was to have a child in the name of her dead husband, Milan. It's a similar circumstance here.

So talk about awkward. Your husband dies and you have no children and it's like, okay, Uncle Bob, hi.

Onan's Refusal

So here is where the story really begins to get kind of awkward and cringeworthy. Verse eight is where this takes place. So here we go. Onan is supposed to fill the gap of social integrity and justice on behalf of his dead brother's wife, who has nothing, has no advocate in society, has no protection. He was the man that was supposed to deliver it. But he knows if he has a child in his brother's name, the inheritance—A, this won't be his child, and B, the inheritance is going to be cut three ways. At least, he might get an increase in the inheritance for filling in that gap, but this man is going to profit more if his dead brother does not have a son in his name, if Tamar never has a son, he will profit more. So he uses a form of birth control to make sure that he gains at the expense of others, at the expense of the weak.

His refusal to help the widow in the context of this patriarchal society was seen as wicked in the Lord's sight. That is why he was put to death. That was the job of a patriarch. You're the one with the power, authority, and wealth. You have the ability to manage justice. So by default, the expectation is that it is your job to make sure no one in your household falls through the cracks.

This story is already getting convicting.

What Happens Next

So what happens next in this story? Well, doesn't Judah have another son? Why, yes, he does. So it's the next son's turn to step up. But Judah is now starting to reflect. He just saw his two older sons die. And the only thing they both had in common is they're married to this chick. So Judah kind of goes to Tamar and he's like, listen, why don't you just go live as a widow? What does that even mean? Go live in the outskirts of town up there. Just hang out. It'll be fun. No

inheritance just yet. But hey, go live as a widow, and when my son gets older, you can marry him then, and then we can work all this out.

So she essentially ran out of the house. She goes and lives as a widow, waiting on the promise. And so she sits down, and she waits, and she waits, and she waits. Again, this is a tough society for her to protest. She waits so long that Judah's wife grows old and dies. It's been quite a while that Tamar's been waiting around. We can only assume it was from old age. So he mourns, and then after he's done mourning, he goes to shear his sheep.

The Practices of Worship

So let's pause for a moment and talk about this culture some more before we go further in the story, because I'm sure you're already familiar. In that time, there was a form of prostitution that was divinely accepted or divinely honored. It was divinely honored. It's called temple or shrine prostitution. And typically, you would see prostitutes at temples or near shrines, and a man would pay to have sex with this prostitute. But instead of it being seen as simply a sexual act, it was seen as a sign of worship and tribute to the deity itself.

So in this sexual act, you were actually in communion with the gods, or the god that you came to pay tribute to. You were actually worshiping the gods. And it was framed as, again, not being a sexual encounter between two human beings, but communion with the god.

In Canaanite culture, these prostitutes were mobile prostitutes. They would wear a veil because they are not representing themselves, they're representing their God, and they would position themselves on major highways and represent deities such as Ishtar or Anat. And men would engage with them typically right before planting season, right before lambing season, maybe before you go and shear the sheep. And the idea was to invoke a sense of blessing or fertility on your endeavors for the next year through this sexual act of worship.

I know. The messed up part of all this is this was not considered adulterous or wicked in society. If you engaged with a non-temple prostitute, oh no, then you're in trouble. Then it's an adulterous act, especially for the woman. No, no, no, no, no, no. But if it's divinely sanctioned, it's okay. And you got to think, who would ever make something like that up? Who would ever make something like that up? Oh yeah, it's a patriarchal society. The rich make the loopholes, right?

At the Crossroads

Okay, so Judah has passed the time of mourning, which means it's acceptable to see him out and about again. He can flirt with girls. It's not a big deal. It's okay. It's been a long time since his wife has passed away, and so he's taking a trip. And Tamar hears that he's coming, so she puts on a veil and sits at a major intersection in this story, and she waits.

And along comes Judah, and Judah looks up and says, "Hey, a temple prostitute." He says, "Hey, I'll send you a goat if I can sleep with you." He forgot his wallet. But I don't have it with me right now. So can I enter this act of worship because I'm going to shear my sheep conveniently after the time of mourning of my wife and I'll send you a goat back.

And Tamar's being veiled. She's unrecognizable. And she says, "Yes, but I'm going to need some collateral from you first. You need to leave me a type of pledge that you're actually going to send the goat back." So he gives her his seal, which was an identifier. Think of it as his driver's license. If you ever forget your wallet, you leave your driver's license. This is the equivalent. He leaves his seal and his staff, and they participate. They do it. And she gets pregnant.

And, yeah, this is a weird story in the Bible. I know.

The Cover Unravels

So Judah ends up in this act of worship towards a fertility deity before going to shear his sheep. And it seemed like a good investment in his eyes at the time. And Tamar afterwards packs up and just leaves. So Judah gets to his field. He tells his workers, he's like, "Listen, guys, I worshiped with this prostitute and I need to give her one of these goats. So can you take one of these goats, that one over there, to her and give it to her, because I forgot my wallet." Again, great storytelling.

So his servant takes the goat all over the area and he cannot find this woman that his master told to give the goat to. And I just picture him like having a goat on his shoulders just at these crossroads, looking around like John Travolta in that black suit, just looking around like what is going on? And he returns to Judah and he says, "Hey, there's no shrine prostitute there." And actually, the locals are saying no temple prostitute works around that area. So I don't know what you want me to do or who you encountered. And Judah just shrugs his shoulders. "Well, I'll let her keep what she had and I'll keep my goat. Seems like a good deal." And so he goes on his way.

So weird, but an entertaining drama unfolding here nonetheless. Some things never change in stories. You have death, sex, drama, and scandal, and I'm really big on observing what and why the biblical authors chose to include these specific details in the story. This is not a video

camera recording. This isn't footage of what happened. There are details that were intentionally left out because they wouldn't add to the point we're trying to make, and there are details that are emphasized. And so it's important that we pay attention to these details when we read the Bible.

So brilliant, engaging, mature storytelling here. It's been weird, but are you ready to graduate from weird to awkward, cringeworthy?

The Accusation

So three months later in verse 24, Judah is told, "Hey, by the way, your daughter-in-law Tamar—the one that's still part of your household, reserved for your son, even though you won't give her to him—she played the prostitute. She's pregnant. And she's not a shrine prostitute." So Judah screams. He says, "You know what? Bring her out. Let's burn her. Let's kill her." He wants her executed immediately. And in this drama playing out, here's what happens in verse 25.

And as they went to get her, they brought her out. And as she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. She's about to die. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these items," she says. "See if you recognize whose seal and whose cord and whose staff these are." So imagine Judah being handed this staff and this seal—his driver's license and his cord. Imagine his face at this moment when he sees his seal. He's made an entire spectacle of executing his daughter-in-law. And the whole town knows. Everybody's wondering what's going to happen next. And Judah is just staring at his seal, playing through his mind every scenario that he can do from this point forward. He has messed up.

And I'm going to point out that if you look in the story, he did not mess up for sleeping with a temple prostitute. The biblical author has no agenda here to condemn him for that. The story doesn't care if he slept with a temple prostitute, if he worshipped a pagan god sodden with unholiness. The story in no way, shape, or form has an issue with these things, the way it's shaped. What this story does have an issue with is what? He neglected to stand up and take care of the least of these. He refused to do what was just. He refused to do the actual thing he was solely responsible for doing. He was the one in power. He had the means, he had the wealth, he had the authority, he had the power to take care of Tamar. And he sent her away to be forgotten, to fall through the cracks. Out of sight, out of mind, right? Let's take a moment. Who in society do we like to place outside of our circle of focus? Out of sight, out of... This is a story about priorities of what a follower of God is supposed to be focused on, their actual

mission. Who cares about temple prostitution when you're not even taking care and loving people who you're supposed to take care of and love?

The Mission That Matters

Ooh, I'm a righteous covenant believer because I don't sin in these types of ways. That's really great for you. It's really great. But you've abandoned the entire mission of what it means to be a covenant believer. Who cares? You're not even doing that.

Imagine being a soldier, which I cannot imagine, but you're a soldier. You learn protocols of being in the army. Learn how to make your bed right, correct. You learn how to press your uniform correctly. You learn the hierarchy and the chain of command. You learn respect. You learn how to address others. There is a code that you learn to follow. These things are great, but you're sent on a mission, and now you're placed into battle, and now you're charged to go take it. You need to take hold of this position, this position, this position. You can press your suit great. You can do those 45-degree hospital corners, man. I'm sure they look great. Yes, sir. Yes, ma'am. All of that, salute. You can do all of those things perfectly, but what if any of those things matter if you won't get out of the trench and do what your mission is to do? The whistle blows and you sit there because you don't want to wrinkle your uniform. It doesn't matter. Who cares about that? You're not even doing the very basic of what it means to be a soldier, which is to complete the mission that you're given to do.

Fraud and Faithfulness

What I believe this story's pointing out is not wanting to complete the very mission. Man, that doesn't just mean that you're a bad covenant believer. It doesn't just mean that you're a hypocrite. It means you're a fraud. Judah's a fraud. A covenant believer that is not doing this basic thing as their priority is a fraud.

Here's what happens next in the story. Verse 26, Judah recognized them. He's looking down. He sees the seal and the cord and the staff. He recognizes them and he says, "She is more righteous than I." The woman who dressed up like a temple prostitute and got her father-in-law to sleep with her. Let's frame it out correctly. She is more righteous. How would we judge a woman that did that today? The very same way they judge her back then, maybe worse. She is more righteous than I. Why does he say this? "Since I wouldn't give her my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again. All of that doesn't matter because he didn't even do the very basic responsibility of what it meant to be a patriarch, what it meant to have the power and authority

and the wealth and the blessing to petition and advocate for the ones who will fall through the cracks if he didn't lift his finger.

Judah repents. Again, what's he repenting of? Failing his very vocational calling. This is the moment where Judah has to face himself in the mirror. He has to look into the mirror for the first time. And what he sees is just like last week. He sees himself on TV for the first time. He hears his voice recorded and played back to him for the first time. This is the time when Judah realizes that he really isn't as much of a righteous man. He isn't a patriarch that is honorable. He is not leading his family well. He realizes that the person that he would like to think he is doesn't exist. And now he's looking at the person that actually is. And he has a choice to make.

Again, he still has all that power, influence. He's the head of the household. She's still in his household and under his authority. He can ditch Tamar right now. He can totally ditch her. "She stole these from me. Now she's a thief and a whore. Hey, I've been looking for my seal and staff. Thank you. Okay, kill her." Who's going to be her advocate if he does that? No one. The head of the family she belongs to is condemning her. It's done. Judah could have totally gotten away with calling her a liar and burning her to death. That's one scenario he could have gone. Or as he looks at himself in the mirror in this moment, he realizes he can embrace what he sees in the mirror as the truth that he needs to work to change. A truth that needs to be addressed. A truth that even though he has privilege as the patriarch, he hasn't been honoring it. So Judah repents.

The First Act of Repentance

This verse is the first time in the Bible that somebody repents. This is the first time in the entire biblical narrative that someone looks in the mirror and repents. The biblical authors chose this moment to be the first time. And they're trying to tell us something in this. They're trying to tell us that holiness is awesome. Holiness is important. Avoiding sinful acts and deeds. Man, these are absolutely required of a faithful covenant believer. Not giving in to lust, being pure, not worshiping other idols. Yes, absolutely important. Absolutely. But I would petition that this story written for and by ancient Israelites is speaking a loud message. What good are those righteous pursuits if you can't even show God's love and justice to your neighbor and to the people that need to feel it most? Good for you. You don't do all those things. You think if you mark enough things off a checklist, you can avoid the entire mission of what you were called to do?

Who cares? I don't sleep with temple prostitutes. Who cares? You're claiming allegiance to the king of kings all while ignoring the very mission of the kingdom. Oh yeah, Jesus talks about this very thing, doesn't he? What's he say about it? People like that? Depart from me. [Matthew 25](#). He doesn't know people like that. He doesn't recognize people like that as his.

The story of Judah and Tamar ends with a rather graphic imagery of Tamar giving birth to twins. It mentions appendages emerging and tying on scarlet ribbons and all kinds of weird stuff that we never actually thought was weird until we read it. God expects more from people that he has put in positions of power and responsibility and influence and wealth. He expects more. That's the blunt of it. Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I." I repent because I refused to take care of the people that were slipping through the cracks. I am the one who is at fault, having the power to actually do something about it.

The Path Forward Through Awkwardness

See, times of awkwardness, if you've ever noticed, are typically right before a time of repentance, just as we see here. David and Nathan. Nathan tells this grand story, gets David all riled up. "David, what should we do with this man who took this guy's little...? We should kill him!" David, you are the man. That awkward moment, David repents. How about that awkward moment when your sin is exposed, just like in Judah? Guys, it's awkward to talk about certain things that you struggle with, with men that you want to be accountable to, right? Sexual addiction or substance abuse. It's awkward. Ladies, too. It's always awkward to go into those moments where you are exposed, right? But typically they lead to a better path. They can lead to repentance. Judah could have walked away. Instead, he repented. First recorded person to ever have the courage to do this. Judah, who did he become? He was the son of Jacob, which means who did he become? One of the 12 tribes of Israel. Judah, who went on to have a lineage that led up to King David. King David's lineage, who went on to lead to whose lineage? Yeshua's.

The Genealogy of Repentance

Something neat in Matthew's account—Matthew chapter 1. Matthew of course starts off with a petition to show that Yeshua is a credible candidate to be the Messiah, the King over Israel and the world. And here's what it says in [Matthew 1:1](#). "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the king, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob, the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar."

Perez, the father of Hezron. Notice here in [Matthew 1](#), Tamar is the first woman mentioned in Matthew's genealogy. He didn't care to mention Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, but Tamar. Tamar is emphasized. Tamar is important. I know everybody has a cell phone right now. If you don't have a cell phone at home, raise your hand right now. Say, I'm a liar. Go ahead and pull out your cell phone and click that little button on iPhone. It should be right in the front because iPhones are easy and just the best thing out there. Click that camera app and open it up. I want you to turn the camera frame around so you're going to take a selfie and you can see yourself in the selfie. There's something I want to show you in this app. Turn it on. It's a really neat little feature here. Pull your phones out. I know you have them right there. Camera app, turn it to yourself as a selfie.

Face Who You See in the Mirror

The decision that you make today to face who you see in the mirror will echo for eternity. What do you see? Do you see the person that you want to see? Do you see the person that you should see? Or are you looking at someone that you know needs to change? Are you looking at someone that you know needs to go through an awkward moment that leads to repentance? Are you looking at a person right now that you know needs to make a decision to do something right? Will you use the ability to help others to actually show God's love to others? Many of you know we have a foster and adoption ministry here at Founded in Truth. It's one that we are extremely proud of, especially how it's evolved and grown during the pandemic, which we never thought would happen, but it's amazing. God is great. We've had this ministry going for about two years, and recently we have evolved our program to not only include foster families within our fellowship community, but also outside of our church in the community around us, whether or not they go to fit or not, with the direction of a wonderful organization known as or called Fostering the Family of South Carolina.

So we set up care communities to surround families who have made the amazing decision to take in children who need a home, who need love and need a sense of justice in their life. Children that society otherwise ignores or doesn't even know exists. I mean, most of the time people don't even think about the foster children in the area, in their community. They are the forgotten ones. They are the ones that slip through the cracks. And we set up care communities around these families to support them, to bring them a meal once a week, to help them maybe do some chores around the house every once in a while. If they need a babysitter for a couple hours because one of their children needs to go to the doctor's office and they can't take all,

these care communities meet those needs in order to support them. The foster care community and the foster care system that we have in our area.

And we have a foster mom currently in our area taking care of a medically fragile infant, multiple doctor's appointments a week, and she also has other children. And guys, we're trying to put a care community around her. We're trying to develop this care community. We already have three households signed up, but we need at least seven households to take care of her. And I'm asking, I'm asking, if you're local, if you're part of this local community, will you allow God to work through you? Will you allow God to give you the opportunity to take care of the very people that are falling through the cracks that society largely ignores?

Will You Fill the Cracks?

Or you could be like Judah and how he treated Tamar. Maybe you're sitting at home right now wondering, how can I help people? I do all these other commandments. I do the checklist well. I do it boldly, with fire and passion, but how can I actually help people? Here is one opportunity. So if you're looking for a sign, if you would like more information about the local foster care community here at Founded in Truth, how to be more involved in it, you can email Ben Cohen, and his email address is ben, B-E-N, at [foundedintruth.com](mailto:ben@foundedintruth.com). The emphasis in the story of Tamar and Judah is the same that Jesus taught. Keep the commandments of holiness. Yes. Keep the Sabbath. Yes. Don't eat the pig. Yes. Don't lust. Yes. But none of those things made the list in [Matthew 25](#).

What Made the List in Matthew 25

You know [Matthew 25](#). [Matthew 25](#), 31 through 46, it speaks of judgment between two different groups of people that Yeshua is judging. One to the left and one to the right. And to the right, he says, hey, inherit the kingdom of heaven because you fed me when I was hungry. You gave me something to drink when I was thirsty. When I was naked, you clothed me. And this group looks back at Yeshua and they're like, hey, we never fed you. Well, we would have been an honor to feed you, but we never fed you. Never gave you any clothes. We would have in a heartbeat if we saw you, but we don't remember doing that. Giving you water? You know we would have, but we don't.

And what's Yeshua say back to them? He says, you know what? Because you did it for the least of these, you did it for me. Then he looks over at the group on the left and he tells them to depart from him. I don't know you, who you? Not because they broke Sabbath, not because they

ate some pig or lobster or something or fill in the blank, not because they did any fill in the blank. No, because there are those falling through the cracks and they chose to ignore them. They chose to ignore it. And that's not what the people of Yeshua do according to Yeshua. That's not what followers of Jesus do according to Jesus.

We Have a Mission

We have a mission. And if we're not actually on the mission right now, if we're not doing something, we need to find ways to do something. Even if it's small, even if it's small. How can I show the love and kindness and mercy of Yeshua in my community today, with my neighbor today? Do you know about your neighbors that live around you? What are their circumstances? We're called to be that ambassador of the King or ambassador of Christ, as Paul puts it. We're supposed to be his representative. Are we doing it? Are we doing it?

If you join me in prayer, Alvino Malcano, our father, our king, father, we thank you for this opportunity to join in and enter into your Sabbath day where we experience a sample, a sign of the eternal rest and glory that is only found in your son, Yeshua. Father, we ask that you would allow us to search ourselves, that you would enable the spirit that the scripture says that you gave us, the same spirit that raised Yeshua from the dead, the same spirit that gave Yeshua his power now resides in us. Father, I ask that the spirit would work in our hearts right now to expose the areas that we need to change. Show us what's in the mirror so that we can be the people that follow your mission, that follow you, that fill the vocation to be your image bearers. Father, I ask in the name of Yeshua that you would give us the strength, give us the ability, give us the mind and the soul, give us the heart to seek out the opportunities where we can be the people who fill in the cracks, the people who advocate for those who have no advocate. Father, we thank you. We thank you for your love, your mercy, your kindness. We thank you for a covenant that only exists because of what you've done through your son, Yeshua. In Yeshua's name we pray. Amen. Shalom.

I'm Matthew Vandrells, and I hope you enjoyed this message. Founded in Truth exists to build a community that bears the image of God and lives the redeemed life only Yeshua gives. If this message impacted you or if this ministry has been a blessing to you, we invite you to take part in making sure the message of Yeshua and the truth of God's word continues to reach others. To make sure this happens, you can donate through our online giving portal at foundinatruth.com/slash/give or by texting any amount to 704-275-0752. Don't forget to like and subscribe for new content every single week. And we thank you for your continued support. And we look forward to seeing you next time. Shalom.

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