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GENESIS 38

Series: Understanding Your Roots

[PRAYER] Lord, thank you for blessing us with such a beautiful day today. A day that we appreciate, especially because we're going to be outside a bit with the lunch. It's just the right temperature in the Barn here and it's just beautiful. Thank you. Thank you for that privilege. We thank you for just the opportunity to gather together and celebrate you. Lord, we need each other and we're grateful for the relationships we share together. I pray that as we look at your word today, Father, that you would teach us. And as we leave today we'd be inspired to follow you all the more and draw close to you in our own lives. So use this passage in Genesis 38 in our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.

We all have a problem and I want to talk about the problem today. It's a problem that every Christian has. It's that tendency we have to drift away from the Lord. Relationships take work. Whether it's a marriage relationship, you might drift away with your wife or your husband. You might drift away if you don't work at it. The same thing is true in our relationship with God. If we don't work at it to stay up to date in that relationship then we have a tendency to drift.

I was pondering this week why do people drift away from the Lord? I think some people drift away from the Lord because they're disappointed. Maybe disappointed in their lives. Of course that's God's fault, they might think. Or somehow they go back to God. So they drift away. Sometimes people are drifting because they're disappointed in people. People who are Christians, maybe people that they live with, a husband and wife or parents, so they drift away from the Lord because they're disappointed. I think other people drift away because they're lazy maybe. They don't do the work that's necessary. Or maybe it's because of busyness that we have in our lives. We have things going on and things happen. And so we've got an extra time in our work life or we've got extended visitors at our home or we've got just the busyness of sports and other activities. So we start drifting away from church. Of course that church isn't only our only relationship with the Lord, but we stop having our Bible study or we stop praying, and then our relationship drifts. It just drifts. It's a problem. When you drift away from the Lord then bad things happen. That's a sad thing.

We're going to look at a passage today that's sad because a guy drifts away. I want to walk away from this passage... This is what I did this week. I walk away from this passage and say, "Lord, help me to not drift away. I don't want to find myself in the same kind of problems that Judah found himself in." Genesis 38 is a paratheses for our whole study of Joseph that we're going through. We're studying the life of Joseph. It's a delightful study, but right in the middle we have this one chapter dedicated to Judah. An important man in the Bible. He's going to be the line of Jesus Christ. You've heard of the lion of Judah. You're going to see where that's found today

because I'm going to read that passage. But he had a line that passed through him. So I expect these great things from Judah and when I read this passage I'm disappointed because when I read it I see that he doesn't really have a strong connection here. He's really drifting. And when he drifts bad things happen. Just watch the bad things that take place. I hope you'll consider your own walk with the Lord because any of us could be the Judah. Any of us could drift away in our lives.

So let me take you into the passage. Look with me at Genesis 38. It starts this way in verse 1. It says – *It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.*

We read right off the bat Moses tells us in this passage that Judah moves away from his brothers. He separates from them. He leaves the protection of his home, so to speak, and he goes down into this area of Canaan and he finds a friend. Now this friend isn't a believer. This friend isn't a Jewish man. He's a friend and he finds this friend and this guy Hirah doesn't seem to have a good influence on him. Certainly doesn't help him when he's doing the wrong thing.

It just reminds me that in our lives our friends are so important. When you go off, you leave your home, you're going off to do something else, you have choices about what kind of friends you're going to make and what you're going to do. You go off to university or you go off to your first job, or whatever it is, and there are people there and they live life a particular way. When they're living life a particular way, it almost seems normal. You say okay, well that's how I'm going to live. And then you end up not having the checks in your life and that God provides when you leave the protection of God's household, his family, so to speak, and go off into the world.

That's what's going to happen to Judah. He's just going to go on in life like the Canaanites. He's moving down into the Canaanite territory, into the world so to speak, and he's just going to start picking up those things and start living like other people do. What you do think is going to happen? You can probably imagine. Okay, he's down there. He's at this public place and he's going to fall in love with a girl and they're going to get married. Can't you imagine that would happen? The woman is not even a believer, so he's kind of abandoning his roots and he's just living in Canaan.

Notice in says in verse 2 – *There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. We don't even know his wife's name. But she was a Canaanite. He took her and went in to her.*

You see what happens here in this situation is when you go off and you're on your own, you just start looking at life and you go wow. You know normal out here seems to be this and this and this. I'm just going to get involved in this normal here. I'm going to marry this person who is not a believer and I'm going to have a relationship. I'm going to start a family with them. That's what he says he's going to do or in his mind, and that's what we're going to see takes place in this story. This story actually encompasses about twenty-five years of Judah's life. We're stepping in and watching this take place.

Why is it that we look at life and we see this normal that looks out there and we say that's okay, it's normal. Just look. Everybody's doing it. Jesus warned us about the normal. He says there's a broad road. Why is it broad? Because lots of people are on there. It looks like the right road. It looks like the normal road. It's broad because so many people are on there, but it has an end and the end is destruction. Bad things happen. But Jesus says there's a narrow road. Why is it narrow? Because only a few people find it. And that's the road that leads to life. Well Judah is on the broad road here. He's just embracing the world. Do what everybody else does. Whatever seems normal out there, that's what we're going to do. So he marries this person who is not even a believer and he starts a family.

Notice it says – *He took her and went into her, (verse 3) and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er.* Er is going to be the firstborn, a very important person in a family. The firstborn. *She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan.* So he's the second born. *Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah.* So he's the third born. Now we have these three boys in this family. He started this family and they're all going to grow up. That's why I say it takes like twenty-five years or something for this whole story to take place in this passage. *Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.*

And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn. So now he's grown up. So Judah finds him a wife. And it says – *her name was Tamar.* Now Tamar is going to be a very important person in our story. Tamar is the wife of the firstborn. She has a responsibility to carry on the family line. The firstborn does that. You want to understand the kind of cultural thing that's going on. The firstborn's wife is going to do that in the firstborn, so they are very important people in this story.

So it says – *Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death.* I'm going whoa! I look at that and that's crazy. Put him to death? Wow. He was wicked in the sight of the Lord, so God took him out.

Whenever we come into contact in the Bible with God's holiness I think we're struck by it. It's just so awesome. We go whoa. When I say awesome, I don't just mean wonderful, I mean scary awesome. I look at that and I go wow. See, the holiness of God is so powerful and significant. God cannot tolerate sin. You say, "Well how does He tolerate me?" Well He only does that because of another quality God has and that is His mercy. Not because of anything we own or earn before God. It's only because of God's mercy that we're not taken out. But when you come in contact with this holiness of God, there's this awesomeness about it. There's I say even scariness about the holiness of God.

When I think about God and His character, I think about holiness at the very center. That holiness is outside of God's holiness all these other qualities that we know about God come. And holiness is the very light, the energy of God inside. It's just awesome holiness. So when we get to heaven someday the Bible tells us that the new heaven is not going to have any sun or moon. It's not going to need it because it has the presence of God. Just the holiness of God is going to radiate His glory and that glory is going to light up everything. So when people in the Bible come in contact with the holiness of God, it's quite an amazing and often a scary experience.

You've heard of the stories in the book of Joshua where God says to Joshua, "I want you to go out and wipe out this whole nation – women, children, cattle, sheep, everything. Wipe them all out. Don't take any of them." And you go whoa. That is crazy. What we're seeing in that moment is the holiness of God and how huge that is.

In the New Testament we see Ananias and Sapphira who came to the church and they lied about the money that they were giving and they were taken out just look like that. Boom. They died. I go whoa. The holiness of God.

Do you remember on the mountain where Peter, James, and John were with Jesus up there and all of a sudden Jesus glowed with all of this light and they fell down on the ground because they saw the holiness of Jesus as God in that moment. The light that came from Him.

Do you remember when Saul of Tarsus was going up to kill Christians up in Damascus, take them to prison. God struck him and he was knocked off his horse. He saw this light, this huge light that he saw. That is the holiness of God that he saw in that moment and he was knocked off his horse.

I just think we all need to be knocked off our horse sometimes and come in contact with the holiness of God and we need to be afraid. We go whoa, God takes people out? Does He do that today? Well in the story of the communion, when Paul is telling us to celebrate communion do you remember what he says? When you celebrate communion, do it in a worthy manner. Some people have not done it in a worthy manner and that's why some of them are sick and some of them are asleep. When he says asleep that's not that we're taking a nap. It means they were taken out. I go wow. That is so awesome it makes me feel afraid. I think we all need to feel that. That's what hell is all about. That's what the holiness of God separates us, and I think we should feel that fear of the awesome holiness of God. When we do, if that's the backdrop on the stage, then when we understand Jesus Christ coming as our Savior, that's playing out in the front, we go wow, I need that.

Because when Jesus Christ came and died on the cross do you remember it all went dark and Jesus says, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" Because in His holiness He could not even look at His own Son because His Son took on the sins of every one of us. He took on the things that make us guilty that separate us from God. He took all of those things on His own body in His own life and He died for our sins. So as that plays out on the front of the stage, we go wow. I am so grateful for the mercy of God. And that gratefulness is so personal that every one of us says I want Jesus in my life. I know I need to be saved. I want Jesus Christ to run my life. I want to give myself to the Lord. I want to be close to Him. I want to enjoy Him. That is powerful. So Jesus died to satisfy the wrath and justice and holiness of God so that when He came He introduced us to the Father.

Do you remember that? He says – *When you pray, pray this way. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed (or holy) be your name.* It's this balance of the fatherhood of God and the holiness of God that Jesus taught us about that we need to understand. It's the holiness of God that should scare us to death that if it weren't for Jesus Christ who died for us on the cross so that we could

recognize God as Father and we want to stay close to Him. We don't want to drift away. We don't want to find ourself with the world. We don't want to find ourselves getting into trouble.

I don't know what this guy did, Er, but *he was wicked in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord took him out*. Now we've got this hole in the family. The firstborn son has died. Now we've got Tamar who is still there and she's going to be a key person in this story.

Go to verse 8. It says – *Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother."* There was a custom in that day that turned into the law to become part of the law which meant that if the firstborn died without any children, the second born would take the firstborn's wife as his own at least for this part of the process and he would have a child with her. It's an honorable thing. So that the line would carry on through that dad to the child of that wife and on down the line. It's an honorable way that you're treating the person if they didn't have a child so that they would be able to continue on the line. So that's what Judah is saying to Onan. That's his job, that's his responsibility.

Let's see what he does in the next verse. Verse 9 – *But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother*. What is he doing? I would suggest that what he's doing is he's taking on the fun and enjoyment of sex without wanting the responsibility of a child. Doesn't that familiar? Aren't there guys today who say I just want to have the pleasure of sex, but you got a child and I'm out of here. So they don't want to take on the responsibility of the child. It's got this thing totally messed up.

So notice what it says in verse 10. *And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also*. Oh that's crazy. So he got knocked off as well. Oh my goodness. And I think Judah is thinking oh my goodness. Because notice what he does in the next verse. *Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up"—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers*. Here. You go live in your father's house for a while. When Shelah grows up I'll let him marry you or fulfill his duty with you, but for now just go live in your father's house. And he's going to forget about her. The idea is let's put this under the carpet here. Let's not deal with this right now because he's afraid of what's happening here. He doesn't want his other son to die. *So Tamar went and remained in her father's house*.

In the course of time... Again, this passage takes place over a long period of time. Twenty-five years probably I'm guessing as you imagine all these things taking place. *So Tamar went and remained in her father's house. In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died*. So now Judah's wife died. I think Moses is recording this to help us see now that Judah is sexually vulnerable. He doesn't have a wife now and that's going to play out in the story as we go forward.

When Judah was comforted with the death of his wife, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. So here he is again, his friend. *And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," she took off her*

widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. So she's going to dress up like a prostitute. She's going to be on the side of the road and she's going to broadcast sex right from the side of the road, just like in our lives.

You know we're going on in our lives and we're just minding our own business. You might be like Judah here working. He's on his way to work going to shear his sheep. And as he's doing his work, there it is. Sex is flashing on the side of the road. He might be trying to do something on the internet, trying to get something down and all of a sudden whoa, here comes this announcement over here. You go whoa. That's attractive. That's what's happening to Judah. Let's see how he handles this. But you have to realize Judah is not only vulnerable because his wife's gone, but he's vulnerable because he's on the way to shear the sheep. This is like payday for him. He's going to get all this wool. Well he's going to be rich. When people experience success many times they are vulnerable as well. They go oh man, the rules don't apply to me. Nobody can touch me. So he's vulnerable.

So watch what happens. *For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her at the roadside and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"* Let's negotiate this. What's the price you're going to pay me? *He answered, "I will send you a young goat from the flock."* In other words a young goat would be a prized payment because not only would you get goat milk or you could have meat from the goat or you could keep the goat and it would produce more goats and you could have a herd of goats. So that's a nice gift. But it's not there with him. So she wants to know what credit he has. *And she said, "I'll do this if you give me a pledge, until you send it."* In other words what are you going to give me? *He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet 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.

Now what's going on here is she says, "Alright. I need some identification." He says, "Okay, what do you want." She says, "I would like your signet" (which is the ring that he would use to make contracts and stamp), "I need your cord" (which was a piece of clothing probably like a belt that would be identified to him), "and your staff" (which of course every person had a staff and it was a special staff that they would recognize). Basically he's giving up his identity is what he's doing. If he were stopped by a trooper on the way home and they asked for his ID, he would say I don't have it. I don't have my ID. That's basically what's happening here in this passage. He's giving up his identity in the passage. I just want to suggest if you go in to sexually immorality, if you go into a prostitute, you give up a lot.

I learned about this when I was a teenager. A marked impression on my life when my dad took me into the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a great tool for understanding more about sexual purity. I'm going to take you there and I want you to see what the Bible says we lose when we get involved in sexual immorality. Just see what God says about this.

This is in Proverbs 5. *My son, pay attention to my wisdom. Turn your ear to my words of insight. It's almost like a plea. Please listen to this. That you may maintain discretion and your lips may*

preserve knowledge. For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. It sounds all great, looks like normal, everything sounds great, but it is bad in the end.

Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it. She doesn't even realize what she's doing. She's involved in the world. This is what we do. Sex is great. It's just a biological thing. Come enjoy it with me.

Now then, my sons, listen to me (listen, he says); do not turn aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you lose (and here's the things you lose) your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich the house of another. At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction!" Self-discipline is important. The correction of others will keep you on the right path. Pay attention those. He goes on in verse 13. "I would not obey my teachers or turn my ear to my instructors. And I was soon in serious trouble in the assembly of God's people."

Hear the solution in verse 15, part of the solution for sexual purity. Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman? For your ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all your paths. The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast. For lack of discipline they will die, led astray by their own great folly.

It's a great warning for us to be careful of sexual immorality. It's out there. It's on the road. As we're just trying to mind our own business, doing what we need to do. It's out broadcasting sex. Be careful. It's dangerous. Don't get involved in it.

Well the passage says that she conceived this child through Judah. So we're eager to see how this is going to play out. Verse 19 says – *Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood. When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of the place, "Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside?" And they said, "No cult prostitute has been here." So he returned to Judah and said, "I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, 'No cult prostitute has been here.'" And Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at." In other words, don't make a big deal out of this. We don't want everybody to find out. We'll be ridiculed for this. He knows he's doing the wrong thing. "You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her."*

And then here comes the story. About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-

law, *“By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant.”* Here’s the ID I have from the guy who impregnated me. *And she said, “Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.” Then Judah identified them and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.”* I wonder what this did to Judah at this moment. Because what he’s saying is my sin is greater than hers. I am a sinner. I am in trouble here.

I wonder if this was a turning point. We don’t know where the turning point takes place in Judah’s life, but something happened to him, probably, that prompted him to go back and to somehow connect with his father and his brothers and to be this godly representation somehow. I only say that because of the words that are said in Genesis 49 about all of the sons, but we come to Judah and it says – *Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? This is where we get the lion of Judah idea. The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.*

The idea is there’s all these picturesque words there to describe he’s an honorable guy. He’s going to receive the blessing. You’ve got to think something happened between the story we’re reading about and this blessing that takes place in chapter 49 and that God is working in his life. We don’t know what that is. But God has something special planned for him.

Let’s go back to our passage in chapter 38. Let’s just read about the birth of the child. It says first of all in verse 27 right before it says – *And he did not know her again.* Apparently he took her into his family, but he didn’t have sexual relationships with her again. *When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.”* Those of you ladies who have been in childbirth, this is a disaster of a birthing experience, as you might imagine. *But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” Therefore his name was called Perez (which means breach). Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.* Thus ending Genesis 38.

I go why is this chapter in the Bible in the middle of this whole beautiful story of Joseph? Part of the answer has to do with this contrast between the holiness of God and the mercy of God and people are eventually going to ask about the genealogy of Christ. What’s the lineage of Jesus Christ. If it is really from Abraham and the son of David, then He must have a lineage. So in Matthew we have the lineage of Jesus spelled out. Let me just take it to you right from the beginning in Matthew 1. If you open up the first book of the New Testament in Matthew it starts this way.

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah 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 (bringing us into our story now), Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron... and it goes right on down to tell us more about the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

You know what this shows us? Here we have a woman and we have a man who failed. Yet God in His mercy steps in and uses them in a powerful way to be this lineage all the way down to Jesus Christ Himself. I take great joy in that. That God will even use someone like you and me and all the failures that we have and He has a special place for us. Our joy is to remain close to Him and allow Him to use us in a powerful way, and He will. The mercy of God is so great that we need it. That's the illustration here.

I think there's another reason why this chapter is here in the Bible. Because in chapter 39, the very next chapter, Joseph is going to have a similar experience where he is offered sex. That he is presented with sexual temptation. He's going to handle it very different than Judah does. We'll see a contrast between integrity, a man who has an integrity in Joseph, and a man who lacks integrity in Judah. Again, lessons for next week that we'll look at a little bit more.

But I want to take you back to the original idea I shared with you about drifting. Because I think we are all in danger. You look at this passage and you go whoa, this is really bad. But any of us could be this Judah. Any of us could be going down the wrong path. We could find ourselves in a particular problem of some sort and getting ourselves into trouble thinking nobody else will know, but God knows. And it happens when you start drifting away from the Lord.

So I would suggest that we all need to create for ourselves mile markers. You know when you're going down the road and you see those mile markers, 1/10 of a mile, 2/10 of a mile. When you start drifting away from the Lord and you pass that mile marker, you go whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm moving away. I'm at mile marker 0.1. I need to make a change here because I don't want to get to mile marker 100 where bad things start. I want to stop now. Those mile markers need to be present in our lives. They come up when you start getting angry more often than you know is good. You go wait a minute. Boy, my anger is certainly getting out of control. Mile marker, whoa, we need to pull closer to the Lord. When you haven't had your time with the Lord for a while and your thoughts are going into negativity like you have in the past and you know that gets you into trouble with this discouragement and depression, oh that's mile marker number one. I need to get back to the Lord and get close to Him. When you're tempted to just go after certain things, but ignore your relationship with the Lord, there's a mile marker. I need to get back to the Lord. And when we see the mile marker, we need to say, "Oh man, I'm drifting. I need to get back."

I think that's one of the benefits for the church. I want to ask you, remind me if you see me moving toward a mile marker and I'll do the same with you. That's one of the benefits of being part of a church, that we can say to each other, we can say in a family, "I think this is going a little bit too far here. I think you might want to check yourself." Or "are you in that closeness with the Lord. Are you where you need to be?"

We don't want to lose that beautiful relationship we have with God. Because when you move further and further away from the closeness of that relationship with God, then bad things happen. We don't just do it to avoid bad things. We stay closer to the Lord because that's where

the blessing is and that's where the relationship is that we so enjoy. Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I know that there may be some here today or listening online that haven't made that commitment to you yet. So I'm asking, Lord, that you would speak to their hearts and help them to come in touch with the holiness of God. Lord, I pray that you would use that in your lives to remind themselves that they aren't all they think they are. That they really need you. They need a Savior in Jesus Christ and that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. So we ask, Lord, for you to work in our hearts each one of us. Those of us who are saved, we ask that you would remind us of those times when we're moving away and we need to get back to you in some close fashion. Do that in our hearts, Lord, and we will respond to you. We want to listen to your whispers, Lord, as you whisper into our hearts. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.