

Sermon Summary | Sunday 30th August 2026 | Tamar

Genesis 38 is one of the Bible's most uncomfortable family stories. It includes bereavement, sexual sin, injustice, hypocrisy, exposure, confession, and shame. But Scripture does not give us this story so that we can keep it at a distance. God tells the truth about sin in order to bring us to grace.

Judah belongs to the family of promise, but the chapter begins with him going down from his brothers and moving away. He marries and has three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Tamar is brought into the family as the wife of Er. But Er is wicked, and the Lord puts him to death. Then Onan also acts wickedly, using Tamar while refusing to give her the future and protection that were due to her. He too dies.

Judah then tells Tamar to wait as a widow in her father's house until Shelah grows up. But Judah has no intention of giving Shelah to her. Tamar is left wronged, childless, vulnerable, and denied justice.

This is where the story needs to be heard from Tamar's side. She has been brought into the family, bereaved twice, used, blamed, and sent away. There is a particular pain in being wronged and then treated as though you are the problem.

Years pass. Tamar realises Judah will not do what is right. She disguises herself, and Judah, not recognising her, sleeps with her. Tamar asks for his signet, cord, and staff as a pledge. These objects identify Judah personally.

Later, when Tamar is found to be pregnant, Judah is ready to condemn her: *"Bring her out, and let her be burned."* It is chilling hypocrisy. Judah is prepared to condemn in Tamar the kind of sin he is hiding in himself.

Then Tamar sends the pledge and says, *"Please identify whose these are."* Judah cannot keep his sin vague or general. He must recognise his own signet, cord, and staff. Grace begins by exposing sin personally: not sin somewhere else, not sin in general, but my sin.

Judah then says the central words of the chapter: *"She is more righteous than I."* Tamar is not presented as an uncomplicated moral example. The story is morally complex. But Judah's confession is clear. Tamar has pursued justice and the family line that Judah denied. Judah stops hiding, stops condemning, and tells the truth.

The chapter ends with Tamar giving birth to twins, Perez and Zerah. The line continues through Perez. That matters because through Perez will come David, and finally Jesus Christ. Matthew's Gospel names Tamar in the genealogy of Jesus. Her story is not airbrushed out.

This is the gospel movement of Genesis 38. God's grace does not hide sin. It exposes it. Grace does not silence the wronged. It vindicates them. Grace does not pretend the family line is respectable. It carries the promise through the real human story until Christ comes.

Jesus comes through Judah and Tamar, not to excuse sin, but to bear shame, fulfil righteousness, and bring sinners into the family of God. At the cross, sin is not merely named. It is dealt with. Christ is the righteous one who stands in the place of the unrighteous. He bears sin, carries shame, and brings grace.

So Genesis 38 is uncomfortable, but full of hope. If you have been wronged, God does not overlook what has been done. If you are hiding sin, darkness is not safety. The safest place is confession before the God of grace. If you are carrying shame, Christ is not ashamed to enter the real human story. He came to bear sin and shame, and to bring sinners home.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where am I tempted to keep sin vague, hidden, or managed, rather than bringing it honestly into the light before God?
2. How does it change the way I see my own shame, guilt, or woundedness to know that Christ came into the real human story to bear sin and bring grace?