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October 6, 2007

Think Again
Genesis 38

Remember the old TV show, “Happy Days?”. Richie Cunningham played by Ron Howard, had messed up badly and been “grounded for life” by his father. Howard Cunningham or affectionately referred to by Fonzie as “Mr C.” Howard asks his son Ritchie. “Did you know there is a lesson in this for you?” Richies response...”I figured anything with this much pain had to have a lesson in it somewhere.” That fits well with our Joseph study. Anything with as much pain and mess ups in Josephs family has got to have a lesson in it somewhere for us as well. Often the greatest lessons of life are the product of our most serious heartaches and hurt.

I tend to like to learn off another persons pain and that is what we are given a chance to do today. As youngest of five children I would watch the older kids as to what worked and what did not. To learn off the pain and mess up of another, so we don’t have to do the time. Some of us however are not quick to learn that way. Some of us have to learn the hard way. Some of us have to make some of the same bad choices. Our faulty thinking leads us to faulty actions that bring pain down on our heads. God wants us to think again.

This morning it may seem like we are veering away from our study of Joseph, but really we are not. We get a chance to learn from Joseph’s brother Judah, who took a left turn and almost missed out on the chance to be a powerful part of God’s plan. We get a chance to see in his life some of the same faulty thinking that perhaps some of us are slipping into that are in need of rethinking. I believe God wants some of us this morning to think again. (PRAY)

Turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 38. In chapter 37 we were introduced to Joseph. He was the favorite son of his father and Jacob made little attempt to hide his favoritism. This caused all sorts of envy and strife among the brothers, so much so they couldn't speak to Joseph on civil terms and it climaxed in a confrontation 65 miles north of their home, where the brothers stripped Joseph of his multi-colored coat, beat him up and sold him in slavery to traders heading to Egypt. Chapter 37 tells us how Joseph ends up in Egypt at the home of Potiphar, head of Pharaoh's secret service. Then comes chapter 38. J. Vernon Magee's commentary says this chapter 38 is almost as worthless as a "five legged cow." Almost everyone who is teaching on the life of Joseph skips this chapter because it appears to have very little to do with Joseph. The Joseph narrative picks up quite nicely in chapter 39 but 38, almost seems like someone "cut and pasted" this chapter in the wrong place. But I believe that all scripture is God breathed and God inspired and is there for a reason. I was curious as to why it was placed there.

After study this week I believe one of the reasons chapter 38 was placed in the middle of this story about Joseph is to tell us why God decided it was necessary to send Joseph and eventually the rest of the family into Egypt. Chapter 38 is a parenthesis to clue us readers into the life of Judah. As I read chapter 38 you will be shocked by the total absence of God in his life. You will be shocked by the worldly thinking and messed up actions of Judah. This is very discouraging because Judah is the leader of these 12 brothers that are to be the foundation of a mighty nation, the Israelites, promised to Abraham. Judah was fourth born, but the three brothers ahead of him, Reuben, Simeon and Levi had messed up their opportunities to lead as first born. In this chapter we see a picture of one who has totally ignored God out of his life and fully been sucked into the worldly views of the culture around him. We read this chapter and are tempted to tip toe right past it because it's quite disgusting in parts. We are tempted to look down our noses at Judah

and think. “How could you with such Godly Father Jacob and Grandfather Isaac and Abraham.” How could you have drifted so enmeshed in the world?

Unfortunately, this is not so unusual in Christians today. We may have a Christian background. We may have relatives who we great spiritual giants of faith. But we go about our daily lives totally ignoring God and just doing what we want regardless of what God may think. Some of us here may have grown up in a Godly Christian home, gone to Sunday School and Awana but have drifted away. The world’s thinking is opposite to God thinking. As I read this chapter 38 I want to you be looking for the drift into the worlds way of thinking. Judah is a classic case of how one slides from a child of a God-fearing home into a person enmeshed in the world, its values and actions. The slide always happens because of wrong thinking. For wrong thinking leads to wrong actions, and those wrong actions will bear the fruit of much pain. Reading from Genesis chapter 38 about Judah. (READ chpt 38.)

I believe chapter 38 as ugly as it is, was put there to explain to us why Joesph and his family had to go to Egypt and even slavery in Egypt. God saw how quickly they ran to intermarry with the Canaanites and adopt the pagan worldview of those around them. God needed to send the family to Egypt to protect them from themselves, to provide of them and to preserve them as a nation for they were about ready to self destruct. Judahs story it placed here because it shows a marked contrast between Joseph. The brothers had stripped Joseph of his coat, but they could not strip him of his character. When Joseph is tempted to give away his strength with sexual temptation he responds so very differently than Judah. We will talk about how to do it right next week, but this week we are going to learn how not to do it on Judah’s dime.

How to think like a pagan:

Any sign of worldly thinking in your life? Have I subtly taken on some bad thinking that is leading me down the road to bad actions. Let go back and take a look at Judah's thought process and how it led him to a life worthy of an appearance on the Jerry Springer show.

I don't need anybody.

I think Judah thought that once he solved his problem, Joseph all would be fine in his life. But his main problem was not Joseph. The heart of his problem was the problem of his heart. Judah was a heart that drifted from God. The first step of drifted thinking I see in Judah is this: 'I don't need anybody'. In this chapter 38 there is a glaring absence of God. There is no mention of asking God whether he should leave his brothers. Do you see his "I don't need anybody attitude" in v.1 "....Judah departed from his brothers." No mention of God being a part of his decision to marry. V.2. He married this daughter of a man named Shua. Judah isn't mentioned worshipping God or building alters to the One True Living God. Judah doesn't pray. Judah doesn't consider God in the naming of his children. He names the first one Er and She names the second and Third, Onan and Shelah. There was no sense of God being a present and obvious part of Judah's daily life. He had pushed away God and pushed away his family. In a real sense Judah was thinking this, "I don't need anybody." I don't really need God. I have the master of my own destiny and the captain of my soul. I am the one who will be calling the shots around here. I will be accountable to no one. I will do what I want when I want it. Forget all my spiritual upbringing. I don't need anybody. Do you want to begin thinking like a pagan, then begin to think that the world revolves around you and you don't need anybody.

I can fix this problem on my own:

Faulty thinking number 2. I can fix this problem on my own. Worldly thinking leads to worldly actions and reaps painful consequences. Problems start to pop through Judah's little world. Judah doesn't raise his son in the ways of God and Er is extremely evil. Judah thinks to himself, "I can fix this problem on my own. Judah hopes that possibly marriage will settle the boy down. So he marries him to a Canaanite woman named Tamar. That marriage doesn't help. V. 6 Er is so evil God takes his life. Judah says to himself, "Not a problem...I don't need God. I don't need anybody else, I will fix this problem." He knows about the existing marriage laws that if a husband died without an heir, his brother was to marry his widow and produce an heir for him by proxy. The son would not be his, but his dead brother's and would have the legal claim to rights as first-born. In fact the son would carry the name of the dead brother. Judah's son Onan went into Tamar's bedroom but only to the point that he satisfied his sexual desire. He took his greed but refused to plant his seed so that she could get pregnant. He wanted the first-born privilege for himself. God also took his life because not only did he sin against his brother, he refused to be a part of God's plan to continue the family line. Judah is trying to fix the problem, but it's not working. He still refuses to turn to God.

Here is Tamar now she has been widowed twice. The younger brother Shelah is next in line, but Judah is running scared. He is not too sure he wants to risk giving Tamar another husband after what has happened to the other two. Judah probably felt like that DA who was interviewing a woman in court about the three husbands who died while being married to her. The district Attorney asked her, "What happened to your first husband?", she said, "He died of mushroom poisoning." "Well what happened to your second husband", "He also died of mushroom poisoning." "Well", asks the DA "what about your third husband?" The woman replied, "He died of a fractured skull." The prosecutor asked "why did that happen?" the woman hesitated then answered, "He didn't

particularly like mushrooms.” Judah is worried he might have a black widow on his hands. So he promises to give her his youngest son Shelah when he grows up, but it becomes pretty evident after a number of years that is not going to happen. Judahs faulty thinking: I can fix this all on my own.

I Deserve it:

Its very dangerous when God’s people begin to think and live like pagans. If you want to begin thinking like a pagan, you will first believe; I don’t need anybody.” And when problems start to come you will decide, “I can fix these all on my own.” Somewhere in there you will start to believe, “**I deserve it.** I have the ability to take. Its right there and available to me, so why not?

When Judah took saw his first wife, the language in the text is very similar to the same words used to describe the rape of his sister Dinah. Verse 2 his wife’s name is not even mentioned. “he took her and went into her.” Crass, crude, no relationship. He saw, it looked good to him. He wanted it. So he took it.

Now in v.12 we find out Judahs wife dies. After a time of mourning, which was one week. Judah goes up to the sheep-sheering festival at Timnah. Now Timnah ought to remind us of another famous Old Testament character who may have been extremely strong on the outside but weak on the inside. Samson was one who had an incredibly Godly heritage and set apart to serve God and be God’s spokesman. But he began to flirt with the world. Samson was so strong he started to believe he didn’t need anybody, that he could take whatever looked good to him and so we read in Judges 14:2 that when Samson went up to the Philistine city of Timnah he saw a beautiful woman and told his parents, “she looks real good to me, get her for me.” Samsons parents protested

encouraging him to find a wife from his own people, the chosen of God. Samson said, "No. I like the way she looks, get her for me."

Some of you are on the road to Timnah right now. Some of you are flirting with the world. You are rationalizing your behavior by saying to yourself, "I deserve it". I have the ability to take so I will. I'm tired. I'm Lonely. I'm frustrated. I'm angry. I'm mad at the wife you gave me. I deserve it so I will take it now. He's listens to me, she doesn't nag me like my wife. Its all right just this time because of what I have been through. You may be walking up the road to Timnah and it may not be about sexual temptation. If my be food, or materialism, or angry words, or risky ventures, or greed. Do you see yourself looking in the mirror? Have we subtly become worldly in our thinking?

Look at what Judah does in verse 12. He goes up to sheep-sheering party looking for action. His wife has died and he feels he deserves to be sexually satisfied. Tamar, his daughter in law hears that Judah is going up to the drunken shearing party. She sees v.14 Shelah is all grown up and there is not a ghost of a chance she will be married to him. So she dresses up like a harlot, veil and all and waits of Judah on the road to Timnah.

In a very businesslike exchange. She offers her goods. They agree on a price. Judah promises to send a young sheep from his herd for her services. For insurance she will get paid, Tamar asks Judah for his Staff and seal. Basically this was his credit card and social security card. They mark his identity and ability to do business. They were useless to anyone but Judah and he was ready to quickly send his friend Hirah back to pay the woman. The only problem was she didn't stick around. Hirah did as much discreet inquiry as he could but discovered no one knew about any prostitute on the road to Timnah.

I want to appear good:

That leads us to the next faulty thinking of one who has slid into worldly thinking. **I want to appear good.** Judah was probably a pretty respected man in his community. He was probably on the town council. He probably helped the town put in parks. He probably gave to the just say no campaigns. He probably was viewed as a moral person with a legacy of faith and spiritual heritage. The problem was he only concern was looking good not being good. The one who is taking a slide down into thinking like a worldling says, "I want to be viewed as a man or woman of character...but living it out is only by convenience. If I think I can get away with it...then character is optional. If I can lie and get the business I probably will. If no one is looking, I probably will. I'll do good when people are watching, but veneer is fine with me. After all isn't image everything? I want to enjoy the benefits of appearing to be good, without the bother of actually being good.

I think that is why Judah calls off further attempts to find this prostitute woman and pay her. V.23 "well we might as well keep them lest we become a laughingstock." After all I tried to pay her, if she didn't stick around to collect her wages, that is her problem. Three months later Judah is informed that his daughter in law Tamar is pregnant with child having committed adultery. Judah is livid. This is going to make our family look bad. How dare you Tamar. V.24 Bring her out and let's burn her at the stake." I have often noted that those who are so quick to condemn and press for judgment and accuse others are those who turn up later to struggle with the very same issues. Judah wants to appear good and exposing and condemning others is a convenient way to try and make yourself look better. Is anyone here beginning to see some signs of subtlety being sucked into the world's way of thinking?

Exposed!

Of course God is not content to let us stay in our deception and worldly thinking. He wants to use us. He wants us to enjoy life as He has created for us to enjoy. So He will rip off our masks. He will expose our sin. He will bring our hypocrisy to light in order for us to repent and return to His heart. In the midst of the attack against her, she simply sends over to Judah's tent his signet ring and staff. "Whoever owns these is the one whose child I am carrying. Simply. Judah, "you're the man! Exposed!"

Right at the moment of exposure we are in a critical point of decision. Now that you have been exposed. What will you do. Will you run and hide. Will you rationalize and lie and try to excuse your way out of it? Will you go on counter-attach and shoot back at them hoping to make yourself not look so bad? Some of you have been recently exposed, at home, work, perhaps a friend. Perhaps the word of God even this morning has exposed you, and you are at a critical decision point right now. What will you do? You may not look at your exposure as a good thing. You may see it only as shame. But I think you have been exposed as a kindness by God who wants to help you see what you are doing to yourself and your family. He has exposed you to give you a chance to live right. He has exposed you not because he want to bash you. He has exposed your sin because he wants to bless you and return you to his heart.

Look at v.26. I like Judahs response here. It is the first Godly thinking hes done. His response to being exposed is humility, he admitted his moral failure. He restores Tamars character publicly, "She is more righteous than I. I didn't give her my son as I should have." I think this was major turning point in Judahs life, for later we see Judah back with the brothers, even pleading for his younger brother Benjamins life volunteering to offer his own life as a pledge. At the end of Jacobs life on his deathbed blessing (Gen 49) he gives Judah the firstborn blessing, "the scepter will not leave from the house of Judah. And through (his

offspring) will be the obedience of all the peoples.” He will carry on the royal and kingly line of this family and nation.

People do change. By God’s grace Judah stepped up in strength when he was exposed and started to walk toward God’s heart. Flirting with pagan culture can erode and destroy families, but God does not give up on us and continues to move us back to his heart and plan. I’m not sure how far off track you’ve gotten but I want you to know that God wants you to think again and look to Him. Perhaps you’re thinking, “I’ve messed up so bad God will never want me back, God would never want to use me. Wrong. God wanted Judah back, he wants you back.

If you think you slid down too far to be used by God think again. I want to close with this encouragement from the Christmas story in Matthew, the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew 1:1-3. What a great surprise...Tamar, the Caananite woman with questionable sexual history. The one who gave birth to twins by Judah is in the family album. Rahab the one time harlot from Jericho. Bathsheba the mistress of King David. All these women restored by God and included by God as part of His perfect plan in bringing the Messiah to us. God still works and will even work His will amidst the whispers of scandal. God will accomplish his plans, in spite of our sins and with our without us. Question. Will you see your present pain as a lesson? Have you noticed this morning a subtle slide to worldly thinking? Now’s your chance to change. Has your sin been exposed? Will you respond in humility and repentance to exposed sin? God’s grace is surprising and you need to know that God will never give up on you.