

The Mothers of Jesus: The Story of Tamar

Dec. 3, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Psalm 68

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Have three people in the group share reading the Psalm out loud (about 12 verses a piece). Before reading, ask people to make a list of attributes of God they hear in the Psalm, and then open in a prayer time of praise based on those attributes.

Icebreaker

Have you ever been the victim of discrimination of any kind? If so, what did it feel like?

Text for Discussion: Genesis 38:11-19; 24-30

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

Matthew begins his Gospel with Jesus's genealogy, but he makes the unusual decision (for that culture) to include several women. And not just any women. Each was scarred: victims of abuse, injustice, and scandal. So why does Matthew single out these women? Their stories show the power of the grace of God to rescue and redeem shattered lives. The fact that these women were Gentiles showed it had been God's plan all along to include every race and nation in His family.

Tamar was the first of these. She married into the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as the daughter-in-law of Jacob's son Judah. Her first husband was killed by God for his wickedness. As was tradition, Tamar then wed Judah's second son... who God also judged to be wicked and put to death. Childless widows were the most economically vulnerable members of society, but Judah was more worried about marrying his third son to Tamar than about caring for her. Eventually, Tamar took matters into her own hands to seek the justice Judah had denied her. Posing as a prostitute, she tricked him into sleeping with her, and she became pregnant. Later, when Judah tried to put her to death for her sexual immorality, she revealed publicly that he was the father.

This was the turning point of Judah's life. A childless widow like Tamar was the ultimate "have not" of that culture, and this moment caused Judah to realize the gravity of his injustice towards her. Serious damage is done to a community when we fail to care for the poor and marginalized, allowing them to fall through the cracks. While not excusing or overlooking personal immorality, this passage shows how deeply God cares about social responsibility. As Jesus told us: to whom much is given, much is required.

No matter who we are and whatever our background, we all need the grace of God to break into our lives – to humble and rescue us from ourselves. This is what Tamar's actions forced Judah to realize. For the first time in his life, he saw his wickedness and how lost he was. The miracle is that he sees this and repents. It took being publicly humiliated; he lost his life, but he received a new one.

Are we willing and open to being corrected in front of others? Are we open to the possibility that we have blind spots and willing to learn and have our minds changed? Trying to be a good person is not good enough. Even good, kind and moral people need the grace of God to break into their lives. All of us are self-righteous, and we must come to accept that none of us is as good as we think we are... and that our self-righteousness makes us capable of very bad things. We must realize that we can be just as narrow minded, blind and self-righteous as the people we used to look down on for being those very same things. That is the mark of God coming into our lives.

Social injustice matters deeply to God, but the Gospel also says personal transformation is essential. The grace of God broke into Judah's life and turned him around. Judah covered the guilt of Tamar at cost to himself, and she was restored. That's how he became a conduit for Jesus to enter the world. What will enable us to see how much we are like Judah? What will turn us into people willing to lay down our lives for others? What will make us willing

and able to fight for Justice like Tamar? And what will eradicate any semblance of self-righteousness in us as we do?

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How do we balance the Gospel calls to both personal holiness and social justice?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Note: the questions below are designed to focus your group on the social justice aspects of this story, and then on the personal repentance/holiness part of the story. Taking them sequentially (as many of the questions as you have time for) will prep your group for the “big question” towards the end of the discussion...

Questions from Tamar’s side of the story...

- Read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1.
 - How many of the names are not recognizable to you?
 - Why do you think Matthew specifically chose to include women (outside of the normal practice of his culture)? Why did he include outsiders (Gentiles)?
 - Who are the outsiders in our culture today? How could God use the experience of outsiders in our culture today to speak to everyone in our culture about the Gospel?
- Read the Genesis passage together.
 - The author of the story clearly points out a double standard in society (the privilege of the insiders/powerful and their accountability for their sin vs. the difficulty of the outsider/not powerful). What are some double standards you see in our culture today? How should the Gospel speak to these, and how as Christians should we respond?
- Read Psalm 68:4-5. How does knowing God as a “father to the fatherless, and defender of widows” shape your understanding of what is important to Him?
 - Read the quote from Tim Keller from the sermon: “When God sees people who have resources not aiding the people who don’t...God doesn’t call this stinginess...he calls it injustice!”
 - What do you think when you hear that quote?
 - What are some ways we could be called to participate in bringing justice to systems and structures in our society/culture? What are some ways we may be called to do so as individuals?

Questions from Judah’s side of the story...

- Judah’s moment of repentance (Gen. 38:26) in the passage is the turning point in the story. Why is it important that he pointed to himself instead of Tamar?
- Judah’s on-going prejudice towards Tamar was a key part of this story. How can prejudice against others blind us to our own faults?
- The end of Judah’s story is redemptive – he becomes “the chosen out of the chosen” of God’s people – blessed with a special blessing in order to bless others. How does this part of his story encourage you?

The “big” guiding question:

How do we balance the Gospel calls to both personal holiness and social justice?

Application questions:

- What might God lead you to be repentant about during this season of Advent. Does anything specific come to mind?
- What might God be calling you to as a way of engaging in His fight for justice in the culture around you?

Experiments of the Week

(Two practical ways to engage with the two emphases of the passage this week)

- Experiment #1 (focus on individual repentance):
 - Try a simple experiment in personal confession for one week.
 - Read through Psalm 53 every day.
 - Each day, choose an area of your life, and invite God to point you to areas where you may be blind to things you need to confess. Examples of areas could be...
 - Work
 - Family
 - Relationships
 - Desires
 - Anxieties
 - Hopes
 - Attachments
- Experiment #2 (focus on neighborhood care/justice):
 - With your group, choose an area of your neighborhood to clean up. Gather together on a Saturday morning, and just walk around picking up trash. As you do so, turn the experience into a prayer walk. Ask God to give you eyes to see the needs of the neighborhood, and speak to you about how you could help as a group.
- After the experience, have a group brainstorming session about ways you can engage in your neighborhood to bring about the “good” of the Gospel.

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Pray for each other around some of the specific struggles that have been mentioned during the application time.